The MAID of MIRABELLE

A ROMANCE of LORRAINE

By ELIOT H. ROBINSON

Presented

TO

Muriel Jones

PUPIL OF

Beechville United

Sabbath School

THROUGH THE

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"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.—Psalm cxi. 10.

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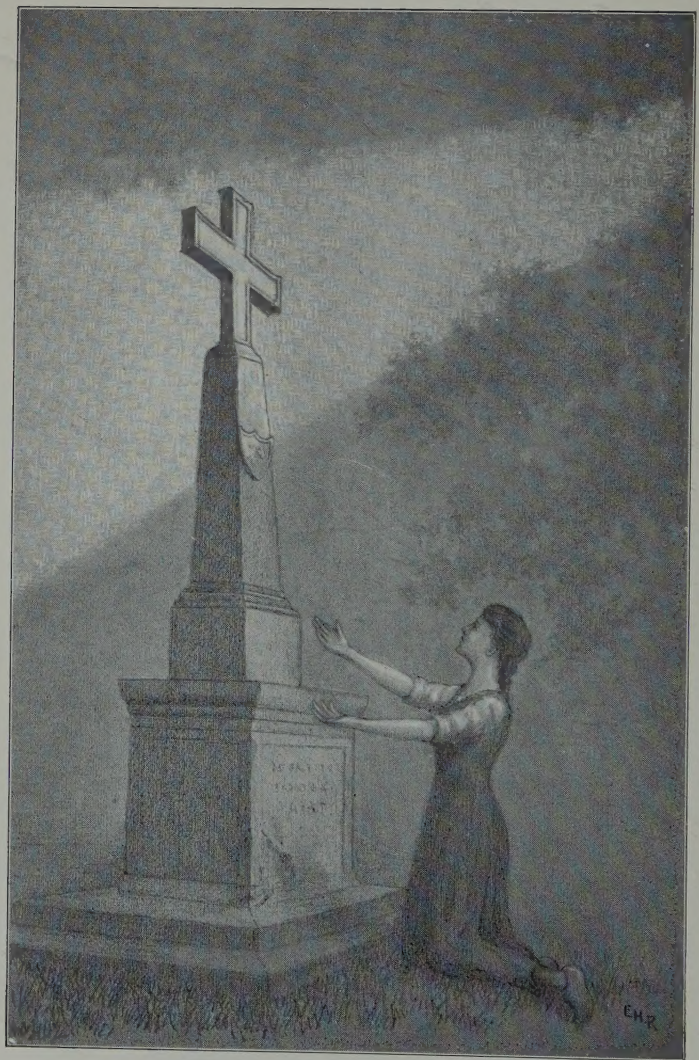

"JOAN . . . DROPPED ON HER KNEES BEFORE THE CROSS"

(See page 280)

The MAID of MIRABELLE

A ROMANCE OF LORRAINE

BY

ELIOT H. ROBINSON

Author of "'Smiles,' a Rose of the Cumberlands," "Man Proposes," etc.

ILLUSTRATED WITH REPRODUCTIONS OF SKETCHES MADE BY THE AUTHOR

THE PAGE COMPANY

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To
All Who Love France Unseen,
Or Having Seen Her
Love Her the More Despite Her Failings,
This Book is Respectfully
Dedicated.

The portrait of
Joan le Jeune, "The Maid of Mirabelle,"
which appears on the cover, and the paper wrapper
is from a painting by
NEALE ORDAYNE

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THE MAID OF MIRABELLE

THE SETTING

Morning in Mirabelle!

A cock crows, Joshua-like commanding the sun, which seems to obey, not by standing still — as at the behest of the biblical patriarch — but by rising. Is it wholly my imagination, or has that clarion *coc-co-ri-co* a note of exultation as though chanticleer really believes himself responsible for the miracle of the sunrise; or, perchance, knows and is proud that *he* is the chosen symbol of his own victorious France?

A warm, rosy flush steals through the wide opened portals of my chamber window. Slowly, but inexorably, it puts to flight the legions of darkness which, since sundown, have reigned unchallenged save by the feeble flicker of one tallow candle tip — for Mirabelle has yet to make the acquaintance of either electricity or gas. It tints

the bare white walls; it softens the crude colors of the few brilliantly lithographed angels and the Virgin and her Child; it creeps further in to enhalo the crucifix above the head of my four-post bed, and imparts to the tiny porcelain stove (whose presence marks my bedroom as one of exceptional luxury) a red glow as though last evening's fire still burned therein.

I see the dawn through drowsy eyes, which close, only to start open again as the restored silence is once more pierced by another clarion call. Now a bugle, before the barrack just over the way, is singing in silver tones the staccato notes of the *reveille*. "*Poilu* get up, *poilu* get up, *poilu* get up, it's morning," it seems to say. The command is not addressed to me, and I lazily turn over under the fluffy feather counterpane that covers me like heaped-up snow on a grave, the high head-and-foot stones of which are hand-carved black walnut, beautiful with age.

I strive to shut out the sounds of stirring life by burying both ears simultaneously in the pillow, and fail. For now, from the near-by convent, whose square tower and squat steeple rises above the village like a guardian sentinel, the morning Angelus begins it ringing welcome to the new-born day.

Clang! Clang! Clang! The bells in turn sound out the tonal trinity, the last — sonorously deep of voice — speaking in slow, measured notes as though it scorned to be hurried at its time of life. Now all three join in the glad matutinal chorus.

A dog barks in the street, and from somewhere near at hand — seemingly just beneath my bedroom floor — comes the muffled *bla-a-a* of a goat, and the answer of its mate. It *is* underneath my chamber floor, for here in Mirabelle one irregular roof covers both man and beast, and in the smooth cement front wall, close by the narrow doorway for the family, is a much more imposing arched entrance for billy and bossy, and for chanticleer and his tribe.

From the uneven roadway there sounds the scrape and clatter of wooden shoes. Mirabelle — all of Lorraine, indeed — will cease to be itself when it proves untrue to the *sabots* which once shod, if not adorned, the feet of Jeanne, maiden immortal, as she fed her flock on the slopes above Domremy not so many miles away.

"*Bon jour,* Madame," and "*Bon jour,* Messieurs," two early voices come floating upward.

The bugle sings another song. There is a confused sound of many heavy boots and voices; then silence, a clear word of command — "*En avant*

marche!" and a rhythmic clump, clump, clump, clump, diminishing down the street. But before the tramp of marching feet wholly dies away it is augmented first by one, then by a hundred fresh young voices in swinging song, *"C'est le cui — le cui — le cui — le cuisinier; le cuisinier du bataillon, qui fait le bon bouillon."* [1]

The song and tramping feet turn a corner and are lost to the ear. Once again I try to overtake fast-fleeting slumber. In vain. There comes a new disturbance. *Rat-a-tat-tat. Rat-a-tat-tat — tattat.* A drum is sounding spasmodically and *sans* military measure. I hear the noise of near-by doors and windows hastily flung open, and now a strident, somewhat husky voice begins to intone something in a jumble of French. The words are unintelligible, but I recognize the voice. It is that of the venerable town crier — for in this tiny hamlet, removed from all such adjuncts of the modern world as newspapers, the telegraph and the telephone (except that belonging to the military) and railroad even, he still holds a vital place in the life of every day.

There is something strangely romantic about that compelling drum and chanting voice. It stirs the imagination, and I close my now wide-awake eyes

[1] "It's the battalion cook who makes the good soup."

and try to picture their possessor clad in leathern jerkin, doublet and hose, and crying forth the news of some medieval event — the sack of a city; a threatened invasion which calls all menfolk to arms; or at least an order from the feudal baron in his chateau-fort on the hill across the river, reminding his village vassals that their tithes are due to-day. But such imagery is difficult. Too often have I seen him, a warped woolen cap covering his unkempt gray hair and clad in an old patched coat, baggy pantaloons and clumsy *sabots*.

However, human curiosity will not longer be denied. It tempts me from my comfortable bed to the open window — just in time to hear that a cinema exhibition will be given in the town hall of the neighboring village to-night. Of all anti-climaxes!

The crier moves up the street to address another gathering, but for a moment I remain, gazing over the quaint seventeenth-century scene stretched out before my twentieth-century eyes.

* * * * * * * *

May in Mirabelle!

From horizon to zenith the morning sky is a hazy melting blue, the color of those uniforms which so lately turned the corner — perhaps it were better to say the color that they *had* been before

passing through the inferno of the Argonne. It lends patches of its hue to the small, irregular pools of water in the cobbled road; it rained during the night, and the tawny dust of yesterday has, for the time, reverted into an evil suggestion of the omnipresent, horribly clinging, ankle-deep, wholly ir describable mud of early spring.

Below me the narrow road limps unevenly down, to end where the clear, cold waters of the beautiful Moselle are sending forth golden glints as the slanting sunbeams dance upon their eddying ripples. On either side the gray-white houses, builded-to-remain of cement-coated stone, descend linked together, not, however, after the manner of city dwellings, but like friendly old neighbors arm in arm.

From the squat chimneys of all save one, thin blue smoke from early wood fires is curling upwards, but to that single exception the eye invariably returns as to a flaw in some otherwise perfect picture. It is as though an insane giant, striding across the landscape, had stepped once in Mirabelle, and hurried on, leaving in his path one hapless home crushed to earth. I have seen whole towns and cities left in shattered ruins by the same mad destroyer, for just across the line of not far distant hills the Reaper whose name is Death

"ON EITHER SIDE THE GRAY-WHITE HOUSES . . . DESCEND, LINKED TOGETHER . . . LIKE FRIENDLY OLD NEIGHBORS ARM IN ARM"

swung his scythe in broad swathes, but in all their pitiableness they have never affected me as does that single cottage across the way, almost obliterated by one chance bomb out of the night sky, when some *Boche* airman, bent on wanton destruction, caught the faint gleam of a peaceful light, carelessly displayed for an instant somewhere in the village, and sent hurtling earthward one of the deadly missiles, meant, perhaps, for Nancy or for Toul.

Beyond the little ruined home appears the only other silent witness that devastating war had raged around our peaceful village for more than four bitter years. There lies "God's acre," with its walled-in rows of gray crosses, all too many of which bear the tri-colored rosettes that mutely tell the tale of sleepers, dead in battle — for France.

Near-by a small orchard shows its early green, and there I catch a glimpse of my *proprietaire* already hard at work pruning the plum trees which are known by the name that I have chosen for my village (it lies, in fact, in the Mirabelle country) and whose possession alone assures their owner of a fair living, for of their fruit is made the much prized gin, called Mirabelle. Beside the orchard, the rich brown furrows of a small garden plot are already beginning to turn green, as the land brings forth its increase.

I lift my eyes to the hills, which appear like forms kneeling lowly at the feet of the distant Vosges mountains, clad in majestic purple. Their rhythmic elevations are five miles away at least, yet they seem but a few moments' walk distant, so pure is the air this morning, and the tiny trees atop them show trunk and branch against the pale blue background, as though drawn upon it in black ink, by a pen infinitely fine.

Still closer, just across the river, is one solitary hill that rises precipitously from the water's edge, its steep ascent made the more difficult by man-built walls of reddish stone, now moss-and lichen splashed, with here and there a black slit behind which, once upon a time, long, long ago, the watchful sentry stood and the archer bent his bow to safeguard from hostile visitors their master's chateau-fortress on the summit above. Only a few shattered walls and scattered stones remain, torn asunder, more than a century past, by angry men in red caps to whom the grim pile stood as a symbol of despotic power in a land which would be free; and now trees, the girth of a man's waist, themselves entwined with ancient vines and perpetually green with moss, stand where the lordly halls of *Monseigneur* had once stood; and, where of old the cavaliers of medieval France had lived and

loved, and wined and danced, now only the vagrant crow has habitation.

My eyes are once more drawn from the fascinating hill to a barely discernible form, kneeling by the swift-flowing river, which sweeps its base. It is some aged grandam, bent in body by the weight of years, and burdens, both physical and spiritual—burdens which have long been the common lot of all women of France, but especially of those who have dwelt within the sight and sound of battle. Up with the sun to do the family washing in the icy waters of the Moselle, she is kneeling there, her petticoats tucked up about her, and her woolen-stockinged shanks emerging from wooden *sabots,* as she paddles and slaps the coarse garments of three, perhaps of four generations into immaculateness.

And beyond and beyond on every side stretch undulating fields, quietly asleep and smiling, as though they had not, during four years, shuddered day and night in sympathy with their sisters beyond the hills, as *they* trembled beneath the shock of battle and the blows of bursting shell. Time it is, indeed, that the stricken fields should rest awhile, and give to Mother Nature a chance to heal their gaping wounds.

Over them smiles the cloudless sky, for it is May

in Mirabelle, and peace has come once more to France.

* * * * * * * *

Was ever scene more tranquil, idyllic? In such a setting could life be aught but simple and subdued? Could a drama with its theme as big as the wide world and as deep as human nature have been enacted amid such surroundings? It seems impossible, and yet . . .

A snatch of bird-like song, sung in a sweet, untrained voice, rises to my ears. I lean out of the window, to look down on Joan as she stands just outside the door below, with one shapely arm, bare to the elbow, stretched out and a small hand resting on the lintel. Her face is hidden from me by its crown of rich, dark hair, braided and coiled around her head, but I can picture the expression upon it as the song breaks off with a little catching of the breath. At least I feel sure that the big, dark brown eyes which hold a depth like a shadowed pool in the October woods, have suddenly become mistily luminous, filled with a shadow that I know so well; that the sweet sensitive lips, shaped and colored to make an artist worship and despair, quiver for the barest moment; that the warm flush of youth and health has briefly fled from her fair cheeks. Perhaps it is all merely in my imagina-

tion — this, and the thought that the sudden break in her glad song occurred when her eyes rested, as had my own but an instant ago, on the little graveyard yonder.

I see her pass her hand hastily across her eyes, but as she turns to re-enter the house the song is begun again. Can I blame her?

Surely it is youth's privilege to forget, and surely there should be no place for memoried grief in *one* day of a young girl's life, at least. And I know that this is the day of days for Joan — her marriage morning.

A bird, black as the coal and white as the snow, darts by the window and soars into the blue, echoing the final note of Joan's song. Below, a clean pink-and-white pig noses its way into a flock of hens and sends the silly creatures squawking and scurrying to right and left, while our friend chanticleer crows defiance at the intruder from the top of a steaming compost heap beside the road. A small cart rattles past, jointly drawn by a panting, shaggy dog, and its youthful master clad in a checked gingham pinafore.

The village is awake and alive again, for it is May and morning in Mirabelle!

CHAPTER I

DANIEL AND FAITH

"THY decision I cannot but commend, Daniel. But I fear that thou hast made it, moved not merely by ideals of self-sacrifice and the thought of succoring the distressed and needy, but rather because the germ of adventure lurks in thy youthful blood. Nay, do not protest; I have known thee since thou wert a baby, and although we all love thee as we loved thy father and mother, thy waywardness hath tried me often."

"I know, and am sorry that it has been so. Truly I have tried to do as you wanted — to do right, foster-father. But the world changes and customs with it, you know, and when a man is young . . . "

"The Truth never changes, Daniel. Our forefathers pointed out the straight and narrow path which should be trod by those who bear the name of 'Friends,' and we have followed it in honor and contentment. But I had not meant to speak at this time of the things that are past, but rather of

thy future, although it has troubled me that thou, with many others of the newer generation, hast chosen to forget the plain speech of thy people — I fear that thy years and new friends at the great University have not benefited thee in the things which count, the Eternal things. It is a small matter, perhaps, and what disturbs me more is the fact that I know thou hast ever had a lusty body and a wayward mind, and hast yet to learn the truth of the words, 'better is he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.' Truly I fear for thee, suddenly thrust amid the temptations of a strange land, the ways of which, I am told, differ so greatly from those of our sect.

"But there, perhaps I am too harsh in my judgements, forgetful of the injunction of our Master. Better let me remind you that the Lord, in His infinite wisdom, never lays upon our souls burdens heavier than we can bear, nor sends temptations beyond our power to resist. No, I do not wish to dissuade thee, although we shall all miss thee sorely. The labor is worthy; see that thou art worthy, likewise. It is fitting that we remain for a little while in silent communion with the Divine Spirit."

The Elder, his wife and the girl closed their eyes in prayer.

Daniel Steele, Friend, had been one of such a group times innumerable. Yet to-night he experienced a sense of remoteness, of unreality, as his warm gray eyes took in the familiar picture from beneath their half-closed lids; the modest sitting-room, plainly furnished and expressive of its occupants' neutral-colored life; the calm, patriarchal appearance of the Elder in his butternut brown homespun suit, his knotted hands devoutly clasped; the serenely sweet face of his wife, who, in her Quaker gray and white, brought the thought of a mother dove; and the demure, flower-like countenance of their daughter.

The Elder had read the younger man's character aright, but he would have been even more seriously disturbed if he had known how hotly youth burned beneath the trained impassiveness of the one who stood before him, straight and strong and with something of the muscular tension of an eager thoroughbred firmly held in check. The truth was that an unusually keen imagination had supplied for a highly sensitized soul and energetic body, outlets which had otherwise been denied him in the small community of Friends where he had been born and raised. Even when he was a child, it had aided him to devise games and play pranks that had at first disturbed the family circle, and then out-

raged the little village. But an innate love of truth and fair play, with the strict training to which he had been subjected in the foster home where he had been brought in orphaned babyhood, had enabled him to curb, if not to destroy, the monster — as others regarded it.

When the world went mad, however, it had strained at its bonds until they nearly broke, and only the real love which he bore for his foster-family, and the inertia of habitude, prevented Daniel from violating the faith of his forefathers and becoming a man of war, as he dreamed of the struggle across the sea. These two things, rather than obedience to the sixth commandment, had held his eager soul in check. And now Opportunity had stretched forth her hand and opened the gate before him. True to their precepts and their name, the American Society of Friends had from the outset given of their best in assisting to succor the widows, the fatherless and the homeless in stricken France, affiliated with those who labored in the same spirit of sacrifice beneath the far-flung banner of the Red Cross. The cry had now come from the War Relief Service Committee for new volunteers, young, strong, fearless in the face of danger; and all that was manly, as well as all that was romantic, in Daniel's nature, had answered.

Yes, the Elder had truly understood some of his foster-son's thoughts, for, even as he uttered his calm words of admonition, Daniel's imagination was supplying a background made up of the distant roar and rumble of battle, the excited clamor of fighting men, and the cries and groans of the wounded. Now they seemed to swell through the silence of the room, beating in upon his brain and making his heart pulsate more swiftly. At last he was going onto the field of the mighty conflict. True, it was not to bear arms against the foe of his country and of mankind — his faith forbade — but it would be the battlefield, nevertheless, and in a land filled with the glamor of brave romance, no greater in the heyday of her power than now, in the hour of her direst need.

The sight of his foster-father and mother, so peaceful in prayer, was not enough to bring his winging thoughts home, but when his half-hidden glance passed to the face of his childhood's playmate, the imagined turmoil of war died slowly away. There came a swift tightening in the muscles of his throat. Daniel had not been praying before; perhaps he did not consciously pray now, but there was something in the protecting way that he thought of her, and wished for her happiness until the wish hurt, that was akin to prayer. Never,

previously, had she seemed so like a sweet bud which one instinctively desires to shield from the world's chill blasts, and there grew in his mind a keen regret for the many times that he, though certainly caring for her in a boyish way, had teased her shamefully, made her the ever-uncomplaining victim of his wild games.

The words of mild reproof which the Elder had spoken had left him cold, but the look on the girl's face stirred him to a realization of how far short of her standard he fell, and of the teachings which had been instilled into both from babyhood. It was for an instant as though he had been brought unexpectedly face to face with his soul, stripped naked of its cloak of custom and religious convention. Daniel stood at last ashamed. His eyes closed and his strong hands clinched in the earnestness of his unworded petition that he might, indeed, be granted that strength which he knew that the others were then praying for him to receive — the strength to be true to the best in himself; in thought and deed as well as word worthy the name of "Friend."

"Faith!" The single word formed itself on his lips. His eyes opened once more, to find themselves still fastened on the girl-woman who bore it as her Christian name. Daniel's heart stopped,

and beat anew more rapidly. Did she really care so much, this little Faith who had always been to him merely a foster-sister, an ever-present fact and therefore outside his romantic imaginings? A single tear had slowly gathered under one tightly closed lid and was trembling there, like a dew-drop on the edge of a white rose petal.

The tear started down the smooth contour of her unnaturally pale cheek, to be hastily brushed away by one small hand, that at once returned to clasp its mate on her lap.

The Elder and his wife, a soft gray shadow, arose and passed from the room, after the former had paused to clasp Daniel's hand firmly, and the latter to press a motherly kiss on his cheek as she echoed her husband's, "God bless thee, my son."

Faith arose also, but stood quietly, with downcast eyes, as Daniel reached out, caught one of her hands and held it tight. The spotless kerchief of white lawn which covered her throat all save a small V of smooth flesh, rose and fell rapidly on her young bosom. "How very sweet and pure she is!" thought the man. "What beautiful hair!" With a sense of surprise he noticed for the first time how truly golden were the glints which it gave forth as the subdued light from the lamp fell on the strands which persisted in rippling, although

conscientiously smoothed down and drawn tightly back into a plain knot.

"You know that I have got to go . . . dear," the last word came haltingly. "I have agreed, and it is my duty now."

"I know. Yes, truly it is thy duty. Nor would I have thee stay, when the poor people across the sea so need what little we can do, and give, to help them in their affliction. But oh, be careful . . . and come back to us, Daniel, for as father hath said and thou knowest, we love thee dearly."

"Come back? Of course I shall," he responded with an ineffective effort to laugh naturally.

"The . . . the French girls. They will not make thee want to stay there? It is said that they are very beautiful."

This time he laughed boisterously at the idea.

"And Daniel, thou wilt be true . . . to thy faith? That is of all the most important, and if thou wert not true, I do not know as I could forgive thee."

"Yes, I will be true . . . to my Faith." He emphasized the word, meaningly, and it did not pass unnoticed, as the richer color in her cheeks indicated. But when he would have drawn her close she broke away, and, with a stifled sound like a sob, ran from the room.

For some moments Daniel stood as she had left him, immobile, but his mind was active with wonderful new thoughts. A clear inner light was dawning upon, and then fairly dazzling it. Faith cared for him — in a manner and to a degree that he had never even dreamed of! And he? He knew of a sudden that he loved her, no longer with the old boyish affection of brother for sister, but as a man loves his mate. Many half-remembered things, theretofore barely considered and taken as a matter of course, crowded back into his recollection; how completely the little family, himself included, had grown to depend upon her quiet efficiency in the home, of which, for all her youth, she was the true center; how firm a will in right-doing lay beneath her sweetness, how full a share of strength beneath her simplicity. There was no neighbor but sent for her in time of sickness, there was no child in the little village but worshipped her and clung to her when she appeared. Even the little humanizing touches in her nature — the way she bent the iron will of her unsuspecting father, and brought him unconsciously to show to the frailties of others a charitableness foreign to his own nature — all came to his mind with new appeal.

His heart, his arms, his throat ached for her, and if the repressive training of twenty-four years

had not held him sternly in check he would have hastened to follow her even into the room which, until that moment, had meant nothing to him, but had suddenly become invested with sanctity. In the dark he climbed the straight, narrow, creaking stairs, and briefly paused before the closed door which had become a portal to Paradise. His thoughts were in a ferment, with love the leaven. New hopes, new desires mingled with the dreams which had been his and so attractive but a short time before, and almost blotted them out.

Was it his imagination, or did he really hear the sound of smothered sobbing within the room, no light from which showed through the crack beneath the door to-night?

Daniel turned slowly toward his own small chamber and there paused again. Then he straightened his broad shoulders almost aggressively, strode forward and dragged his one valise from beneath the bed. The die was cast; but the future had changed from beckoning adventure into stern duty. Hands that worked with almost feverish haste threw the garments of his limited wardrobe into the bag; then they began to move more and more slowly until they stopped, holding a correspondence portfolio which he had used at the University.

"I've got to go forward, but I just can't go now . . . without knowing for sure . . . " his lips half spoke the words.

His actions became feverish once more as he seized a pen and sheet of paper, but there followed many long pauses before the brief note was finished. It ran: "Faith, dearest. I cannot go away without telling you that I love you, not as a brother his sister, but as a man does a woman who is nothing to him — and everything. Can I dare think that perhaps you care for me a little in the same way? If I could only be sure of that, I would go abroad as must a sailor who knows that after the voyage, full of possible perils and storms, a calm harbor awaits his return. I long to hear you tell me so, yet I dare not wait to see and to ask you to-morrow, for I know that if my wish should come true I might not be strong enough of will to go at all. And I *must* go, now. If what I hope, but do not deserve, is really so, please, *please,* telegraph the single word 'yes' to the forwarding address in Philadelphia, which you have. If I am presumptuous and wrong, be assured that I shall understand, and love you none the less. But if the answer is the one I hope for, I shall go overseas stronger in every purpose and always true to my Faith, personified. Daniel."

With the folded note in his hand, he crept once more to the closed door. No sound from within was now audible, and he visioned the girl as he had often seen her when she was a child — one white arm in its severely plain long-sleeved night-gown under her head, and the hand hidden amid a tumble of unbound hair falling in a golden cascade, as nature had meant it to, over the pillow. Cautiously he slipped the letter beneath the door and stole back to his own room. But it was not to sleep, although he threw himself, fully dressed, upon the quilted cover of the bed. The first pale flush of dawn, supplanting the paler moonlight, found him with eyes still wide awake.

Daniel arose, made his few final preparations in silence, and hastily tiptoed down the hall and stairway, with just one lingering glance at Faith's door, from beneath which still appeared a tiny corner of white. It was yet an hour to train time, but he was urged to haste by the sounds of movement within his foster-parents' room. True, they might feel disappointment if he left without their bidding him a last farewell, but Faith would surely be awakened, and he was suddenly panic-stricken at the thought of meeting her after she had seen his note, and, perhaps, being forced to read in her face something which he could not bear to see, and she could

not dissimulate. He fairly ran from the little porch.

Through the sleeping village he walked with long strides, but stopped on the outskirts to look back just once. A soft gray mist lovingly enveloped his boyhood home and melted into the calm and cloudless western sky. Then he turned and faced the distant east. The sun of a new day was on the verge of rising; like an unseen artist with an invisible brush it was painting the broken clouds along the horizon in brilliant, angry colors.

At last the train that should bear him away on the first step into the future appeared in the distance, heralded by a streamer of black. It left him, a few hours later, in the great city, whence he was to embark for France. But, long before he reached the headquarters of the American Friends Service Committee, a message had arrived for him, over the singing wire. It contained only one word, and that word was — "Yes."

CHAPTER II

JOAN

"Look, my mother, little Pierre has a new soldier's cap."

Joan laughed merrily as she pointed through the wide open window. But the laugh ended in a sigh, and an expression of tender pity crept into her brown eyes as they returned to the embroidery in her lap. Indeed, the six-year-old, who was marching so proudly down the road — his small *sabots* clattering on the cobblestones, his sturdy legs bare, his little jacket and pantaloons patched and frayed and enveloped in a patched pinafore, whose blue checks had nearly faded away from frequent washings, and his wooden gun held high on the shoulder after the prescribed manner of the French manual of arms — presented a picture at once comical and pathetic. For the new peaked rabbit cap of horizon blue, worn with such pride, was so large as nearly to mask the chubby baby face beneath it.

"Poor little one," she half whispered. "Oh, if

only I could do more for them all, our orphaned children! Perhaps it is true that the cruel world does not owe a living to its grown-up people, but surely its babies deserve something better than the lot of refugees — fatherless, motherless, homeless, and robbed of all the joys of childhood. *Dieu,*[1] how I hate the *Boche;* how I wish that I could myself fight against them!" Only you who have heard a woman of France speak the word, "*Boche,*" can know the full measure of loathing and obloquy contained in it.

"There, there, Joan," responded her mother, as she bent her thin back the better to bite off a thread from the dainty chemise which she was embroidering, "have we not troubles enough without thinking of other things that thinking cannot help? Thou canst not fight against them, as thou well knowest, and is it not enough that thy only brother is in the army? Come, thou art doing

[1] The author has in this story refrained from attempting to render literally into English the idioms of the French language, nor does he introduce French words, except in a few cases where a typical expression or exclamation is incapable of translation — such as the ejaculation "*Dieu,*" which is by no means a profanity in French. He has, however, retained the use of the second person singular, so quaint to our ears, since it has become obsolete in English except in the "plain language" of the Friends, for it is still a part of the French tongue and invariably used between relations and intimate friends.

THE EDITOR.

more than thy share, already, to help the little ones who have been sent to Mirabelle for refuge."

For a moment there was no sound in the tiny bare-walled room which served three generations as a place to cook and eat and work, save for the contented purring of Minite beneath the square of fine linen on Joan's lap, and the faint sounds from overhead, where her younger sister, Suzette, was thumping up the fluffy feather counterpanes for the beds. Then the little mother readjusted her steel-rimmed spectacles before her squinting eyes, rethreaded her needle, and, as her flying fingers continued the design, said, "I have meant to speak to thee before regarding this matter, Joan, and to tell thee that I know of the bread and sugar which thou hast secretly given to the little Pierre, when I was not present to hinder thee. The bread I do not begrudge, if he is hungry — although it speaks ill for the generosity of neighbor Lefevre — but thou knowest how well nigh impossible it is to obtain even a little *livre* of sugar; and has not the Mayor told thy father that no new cards for it are to be given out next month?"

"I know. But surely, mother, I can do as I wish with my own share, and if I like my coffee as well unsweetened . . . "

"'Like it as well unsweetened' — listen to her!

Since when hast thou liked it unsweetened, then? It is since that Pierre and his sisters came from Verdun. Dost thou not remember how I used to say to thee daily, that thy blood would turn to sugar and water if thou drank thy coffee so sweet?"

"But he is only a child, my mother; and children . . . "

"He is French, and the young as well as the old must learn to sacrifice, for only so can we conquer."

"'*Must* learn?' Have they not learned it long ago? Behold the grandmother there!" With a passionate Latin sweep of her shapely arm, Joan again pointed out of the window to indicate the bowed form of Madame le Jeune, who was slowly entering the yard, pushing before her a hand-barrow of home manufacture, piled with stumps and heavy tree branches. Leaning partly out over the stone sill, she continued, "My faith, such a great load, grandmother! Is not then seventy years too old for a woman to bear a burden so heavy?"

The old woman cackled toothlessly, as she wiped the sweat from a face deeply graven with lines, but still rosy, "'To bear such a burden!' she says. Did I not bear thy father, and he has for fifty years been so great a burden that *this* one seems as nothing."

There was an answering laugh from above her head, where her son, almost as bent and wrinkled as she, from his forty years of ceaseless labor in the cotton mill and garden plot, was nailing a vagrant limb of the pear tree to the cement wall.

"Waste no breath in sympathy for thy grandam, Joan. Old she may be, but her strength is greater than thine own. By the good Lord, I had almost thought that France had forgotten how to breed strong men and women, until this war showed us that the blood of those who conquered nearly all the world for the Little Corporal, had not ceased to run in our veins."

"If thy generation had raised *real* families, as do the beasts of Germans, there would, perchance, have been no war," answered his mother, tartly, whereupon her daughter-in-law spoke from within the room, "And art thou not then content to have one grandson in the battle? I thank the dear God that there are no more."

"*Mother!*" cried Joan, and added — as have innumerable maids throughout the ages — "Oh, why wasn't *I* born a man!"

"If thou wouldst help to do a man's work, lay aside thy *broderie* and hasten to the store to buy a few more nails for me," called her father.

The girl willingly laid her task aside, arose

from the low, straight-backed wooden chair, shook a few threads from her full skirt, tossed back her head to readjust one of the long, thick braids of hair which had fallen forward over her breast, and started blithely out. In the narrow paved entryway she paused long enough to slide her slippered feet into the carved *sabots,* for it had rained during the night. Laughingly, she *shooed* before her out of the door a wildly squawking, much flustered hen which had been caught between the fence of the little front yard and grandmother le Jeune with her load of wood, and fled down the entry for refuge. The commotion drew the attention of Pierre across the road, and he broke off his self-appointed guard mount to run toward her, crying in a childish treble, "Good morning, my Joan."

"*Halt! Salute!*" The commands rang out in the girl's clear voice. To rigid attention came the small form, the lathe gun slid down into the prescribed position at his right side, his grimy left hand snapped up across his pinafore. Joan's own arm swung smartly up, elbow raised, hand to her forehead, palm outward.

"On the shoulder. *Arms!*"

Back to its former position went the weapon of wood, and straightway a sticky hand was snuggled into one of hers, as the small soldier of France

glanced up sidewise from beneath the almost extinguishing cap, with a look half roguish, half pleading.

"Is it that thou wouldst accompany me to the store, my little one? Forward, then. '*Marchons! marchons! qu'un sang impur abreuve nos sillons.*'" Pierre's piping treble joined with Joan's sweet soprano in the stirring chorus of the *Marseillaise,* as they stepped off together.

"Now sing '*Vive le Pinard,*'[1] I like it better, Joan."

"Is it then the song, or the wine itself that thou lovest better, mischievous one?" teased the girl.

"The song, the song. Have not the *poilus* taught me to sing it all through?"

"No, I shall not sing at all. I am very sad."

"My Joan is sad? But why?"

"Because her Pierre did not go to the school this morning with his sisters. Thou promised me . . ."

"To school! I am a soldier, and soldiers never go to school." The little hand was hastily withdrawn from her clasp, and the diminutive figure again assumed a martial mien.

"How many soldiers, now in the awful trenches,

[1] "*Pinard.*" Soldier slang for the *vin ordinaire* — cheap red wine.

wish that they were back in school to-day," whispered the girl, as a heavier boom from the Northeast swiftly carried her thoughts to the front where her own brother — her junior by a year — was helping to hold the long, thin line flung across France, a barrier which might bend, but never really break, before the onslaught of the *Boche.*

"But come. Tell me where thou hast found thy fine new cap."

The boy pushed it up from one eye, and answered, "It is the cap of my brother Jean, a truly soldier. He is at our house on permission. It is late last night that he arrived to spend a whole day with me, Marie and Georgette; but he is instead spending it in bed, I think, for he is not yet awake. He is very lazy, is he not, Joan?"

"Perhaps he is very tired, poor lad. If he is hungry, too, when he awakes, and thou wilt bring him to our house, I . . . "

"But he is not hungry, ever. Is he not the orderly to *M. le Lieutenant,* and so has always plenty to eat? I think that I shall be an officer, and not a *poilu,* when I grow up, so that I may have something to eat . . . always," mused the boy.

The girl and her military escort turned the corner at the foot of the little hill, and stepped down into a low doorway which led into a shadowy shop,

converted out of one room of a dwelling house. A widely varied, if meager, assortment of groceries, dry goods, and hardware, together with the inevitable cask of cheap red wine, cluttered the single counter and uneven shelves. As they entered, to the jangling of a bell in the room beyond, a woman, young as to figure but sadly old of face, and clad in the black that proclaimed her a widow almost as soon as wife, came to greet them, still carrying in her hand her workbasket filled with half-embroidered linen. Her patient, tired eyes, dulled with pain, peered near-sightedly into the semi-darkness.

"Good-day, Mlle. Joan. What is it that you desire this morning?"

"A few nails, like this one," answered her customer. "How much do they cost by the *livre* now? Two francs? But are they not very dear, Madame?"

"Will Mademoiselle have the kindness to tell me what is *not* very dear in France, now? Especially the things made of iron and of steel, every gram of which we need for the big guns and their beautiful shells with which to kill the *Boche*." A flash of hatred shone from her eyes, but faded quickly. "And will that be all? Thank you. Good-day, Mademoiselle."

"Good-day, Madame."

The two comrades started to climb the slight ascent, Pierre's short legs striving valiantly, but in vain, to match their stride with Joan's free steps, and the small soldier's hand again sought the protecting comfort of her firm clasp when a mild mannered cow strolled leisurely in front of them, to quench her thirst at a stone trough by the wayside.

"Look, look! It is my Jean. He is at last awake," the child cried, as they neared their destination, and Joan's eyes fell upon a tall, straight figure in battle blue, standing before the door of the house almost opposite her own. He was bareheaded, for obvious reasons, and his close-clipped brown hair glistened as though his head had just come out of a pail of water — as, indeed, it had. Sleepiness, and appreciation of the picture before him, struggled for supremacy in the young man's blue eyes, but there was no appearance of warweariness in the healthy red glow beneath the tan of his cheeks, or in the firm, well modeled lips that smiled gaily beneath the small, blond mustache.

"He is not really handsome, perhaps," thought Joan, woman-like. "But I am sure that he is pleasant and very, very brave. I know that I should like him." Her eyes traveled with undis-

guised approval over his well-knit body in its belted tunic, and the straight, muscular legs which appeared to full advantage in their tightly wrapped spirals of blue cloth, even if the clumsy black shoes below were not things of beauty.

"Thief!" called the man, as he caught sight of the missing cap atop the head of his little brother, and took a purposeful stride towards him.

"Run!" laughed Joan, on an impulse born of the merry morning and her own overflowing youth, and as the child promptly obeyed she covered his retreat by stepping in front of the pursuer. Jean prevented full collision by dodging, but his arm knocked the paper of nails from her hand, and its contents strewed the road. Simultaneously both bent to recover them, a wayward strand of the girl's long hair looped itself firmly around one of the small steel buttons, stamped with crossed cannon, which adorned his shoulder strap; she gave a little cry, more of surprise than pain; a dog started to bark loudly, which sent the flock of silly hens flying hither and yon once more.

"A thousand pardons, Mademoiselle." Jean had finally succeeded in disentangling the button, although a cynical onlooker might have accused him of making haste slowly. "But I am awkward this morning."

"Not at all, Monsieur; it was I." She was even rosier of cheek than was her wont, and the mist of pain-drawn tears made her deep brown eyes sparkle bewitchingly, a fact that was not lost on the other. "Oh, oh. Your hand, it has been wounded. Did I hurt it? I am terribly sorry."

The *poilu* made a half-hearted effort to thrust the bandaged member behind his back, but the girl was nevertheless holding it gently as he replied, "It is nothing, nothing at all. A slight infection in an old scratch."

"Look, Joan. I still have the cap," shrilled Pierre from a safe distance.

"'Joan?' Is it then that you are the Joan of whom my little sisters have written me so often — she whom they call their angel?"

"I am Joan le Jeune, yes, but no angel, I fear," replied the girl, the dark lashes veiling her downcast eyes.

"Joan le Jeune? But not the sister of Henri, of my own battery of seventy-fives?"

"Henri? Do you know him, then?" The large eyes were wide open again, and a joyful light was dawning in them.

"'Know him?' But assuredly. Are we not comrades — brothers almost? Do we not serve the same mistress, the long and slender beautiful

gun which he has christened 'Joan,' after you? Ah, but *it* is an angel, our angel of death."

"Truly? Your beautiful cannon is called for me? Then I am happy, for if I cannot myself fight against the *Boche,* my namesake fights for me." Joan stood very straight, her lips parted, hands clenched and eyes flashing.

"The Spirit of France," breathed Jean, with a look of open admiration in his own blue eyes.

"A friend of our dear Henri! Then you must come at once to my house, and tell us all the news of him whom we have not seen for many long weeks. Pierre, thou shalt come also, for there is bread and sugar for thee — a very little sugar," she added, as her face clouded momentarily. "Come, have no fear of thy brother, for I shall protect thee, my little one."

It would seem that Pierre was not very greatly frightened, for as the three crossed the road to Joan's cottage his sticky hands were clasping a hand of each; and the face of Joan's mother — who had been drawn to the window by the sound of the commotion and merry laughter — assumed a startled expression, as though a vision had been granted her of the years to come.

When father le Jeune learned the identity of the visitor, he clambered stiffly down the ladder and

made him welcome with a horny-handed grasp, and nothing would do but that Jean enter the little room, seat himself at the plain wooden table, and partake of a tiny glass of the crystal-clear and potent *Mirabelle,* a tall bottle of which was hidden in the corner cupboard for all fete occasions.

The sunshine poured into the room, silhouetting Joan's perfect profile, and creating an aurora around her head as she sat by the wide open window; it drew from her flashing needle fleeting darts of light which jumped about the wall and kept Mimite's head in constant motion following them, as she lay contentedly on Jean's knees; it imprisoned itself in the sparkling liquor; it brought out the deep rich red of the ancient tiles on the floor; and, perversely, as it made more beautiful the things wherein beauty dwelt, it showed up each discoloring spot and disfiguring crack on the plaster wall, the crude lithography of its sole ornament — a gaudy calendar — and the network of wrinkles in grandmother's strong, homely face.

But Jean, as he told the story of the front in fluent French, had no eyes for the defects in the picture, for his gaze seldom, even for a moment, left the flushed, lovely face of Joan, the Maid of Mirabelle, as she bent industriously over her work.

CHAPTER III

IN THE DARK

The slow-moving train crept eastward through the dark, without lights, and with every window closely curtained. Then, for the hundredth time, it seemed to Daniel, it came to a creaking halt. He stirred uneasily in his cramped position, and the Red Cross nurse, who — wrapped in her long blue cloak and with her feet tucked up under her — was leaning heavily against his shoulder, groaned beneath her breath, and murmured, "O Lord, again? Wha-what time is it?"

Laboriously he extricated his left arm, and consulted the illuminated dial of his wrist watch. "Quarter to three. Cheer up, we're only nine hours late, already."

"I suppose that I'm breaking your arm; but I'm past caring," she admitted, as she pillowed her head against the sleeve of his heavy reefer, whose shoulder bore an insignia of a four-pointed black star on another of red, which, together, formed the

eight-pointed emblem of the city of Nancy — a symbol that, with the freedom of the city, had been granted the Society of Friends fifty years before, in recognition of its valiant work of rescue carried on there during the Hun's earlier crime against France.

"Not in the least. I don't mind," responded Daniel. A few months earlier his Quaker training and traditions had suffered a rude shock, when he had undergone the first of a series of similar experiences, but it was now an old story to him — this travel by night on a train where seven or eight men, and a woman or two, were generally crowded into a compartment designed to hold six.

By no stretch of his romantic imagination could he regard the long journey from Paris as having been a pleasant one. The car had, to be sure, been marked *Premiere Classe,* but the thick comfortable cushions were missing from the compartment's seats, and the thin layer of cloth which concealed from sight the wire springs beneath, did little else; the pale gray broadcloth of the upholstered backs was spotted and stained from the contact of many unwashed heads, and the air was close and heavy with the odors of clothing and humanity. The other occupants of the crowded quarters — one American and six French officers returning to their

various units at the front — had all been in the hairspring humor born of the strain of constant fighting, and quarrels among them had been frequent until restless slumber had overtaken them, one by one. They had reached their culmination when the American had savagely driven the butt of his automatic through a pane of glass in one of the windows, after he had opened it repeatedly, in an attempt to let in some fresh air, only to have it closed a few moments later by one of the Frenchmen. Now the place was cold and damp, and Daniel's feet were numb, despite their thick woolen socks and heavy boots — boots that were caked ankle-deep with dried mud. Only one narrow streak of wan light, escaping from a slit in the hemispherical silk shade closed down around the single electric bulb, dimly illuminated the compartment, and deep shadows made the more grotesque the queer postures of the sleepers.

A thin, high-pitched whistle, which might have been emitted from a child's toy, sounded outside, and the train protestingly resumed its halting advance through the darkness.

All was silent without and within, save for the heavy breathing of some of the officers.

Unable to get to sleep again, Daniel lifted one edge of the tightly drawn curtain, and peered out

into the night. A quarter moon dimly disclosed the landscape. Shadowy forest forms, here and there jagged and torn by shells which had burst among them, made the horizon; uneven lines of rusted barbed wire crossed the near-by barren field, and through the foreground were scattered small, irregular pools formed by a recent rain, whose water reflected the pale night.

"Shell holes," thought Daniel. He had been bred in the middle of a farming district, and the knowledge of the years which must elapse before these fields of France would once more yield their vitally needed crop — or any crop except one of iron and steel — filled his heart with mingled anger and pity. Yet the sight stirred within him another feeling, as well. It was his first journey toward the front; through territory which had once been the front itself.

The tide of war had turned at last. Two months previous the German Gibraltar — the St. Mihiel salient — had been wiped out as though the blue waves which it had held back so long had risen, turning to brown in the turmoil of that rising, and swept over it irresistibly. Verdun, the immortal citadel, the Port of France, was at last freed from the danger which had daily menaced it during three years of appalling frightfulness; the section be-

tween which and the despoiler it had stood as a shield and buckler, was beginning to draw its first free breath, and to stir with uneasy yearning for its children. Thither, into the Lorrainian valley of the Meurthe and Moselle, Daniel was bound. His apprenticeship was ended. He was a fully trained worker, filled with the strength of youthful enthusiasm for his task.

Ten months before, in response to a suggestion of the *Sous-Prefet* of Verdun, his society had taken over thirty villages west of that historic city, and begun to make elaborate preparations for the eventual return of their inhabitants, but the gigantic German offensive in the spring had disrupted all plans and forced a hasty evacuation of everyone within its path. Now the work had been begun again, with a zeal which the discouraging losses and set-backs could not quench. Others were before him in the sector, but he had been assigned to certain villages whose condition he was to study, and he felt like a scout, riding forward alone to examine the field for a new battle — that of reconstruction and rehabilitation — which would begin as soon as the inflexible governmental ban should be raised, and the invasion of peaceful inhabitants, returning to their shattered homes, commence. They would be coming back from exile, he knew; at first a

few, then more and more, just as the tiny waves of an incoming tide creep up the beach. Apparently uncontrolled, but in fact ruled by a law as inexorable as nature's own, they would come, for the Government in its wisdom had decreed that only those might first return from their widely scattered places of refuge, who could assist in rebuilding the broken homes, and later — in the spring — those who could till the soil and so add to the store of material sustenance for the rest, who would follow in the course of time.

Again a grinding of brakes, another jolting halt. Mumbled curses in two languages came from the lips of the officers, and the American angrily jerked open the shade which masked the electric light, and reached for the handle of the door at the side of the compartment. A French captain sprang to intercept him, while another hastily closed the shade, both expostulating rapidly upon the possibility of a *Boche avion* being in the sky, watching like a night hawk, for just such an incautious signal. With an oath, the Yankee forced his way outside, and, in strenuous English, began to demand what in hell was the matter now.

A harried little guard, who chanced to be passing at a dog-trot, apparently guessed the purport of the inquiry from the tone in which it was uttered,

although the words themselves were unintelligible to him, for he answered in excited French, "There is a wreck on the track ahead — an American troop train has been derailed." And he added some things uncomplimentary to crazy American engineers who insisted in going hell-bent-for-election, or its French equivalent, over an unfamiliar war-time track in the dark.

His interrogator knew just enough of the language to get the drift of this remark, and his nerves were already sufficiently on edge from months of duty on the fighting line, capped by the night on the train, to cause him to snap out, "Well, by G—d, they go somewhere anyway, even if it is only to hell. They do more than just jump around, like frogs."

If neither of the speakers could fully understand the other, a fact which perhaps prevented worse from happening, Daniel could appreciate the remarks of both. He had studied French at the University with more than common diligence, not so much because of an unusual conscientiousness in the acquisition of knowledge, but because it was the language of romance, and opened a path down which his mind could travel with delight. It had therefore been a source of surprise and mortification to him upon reaching France, to find himself al-

most hopelessly at sea in the speech of its people, and to realize that conversational French in an American school, and in the land of its nativity, are two quite different things. For some weeks, the fluent, unmodulated language had been merely a jumble of sounds to his ears, but as time passed he had begun to pick out fragments of the verbal picture puzzle, and it was now fast taking form, although he was still unable to think, and so to speak rapidly, in the foreign tongue.

Half amused, half disturbed, he was on the point of interposing, for the purpose of pouring oil upon the troubled international waters, but the nurse laid a restraining hand on his arm, and said with a sleepy laugh, "Oh, let them get it out of their systems. Talk is a safety valve, and apparently our compatriot has got to fight with someone to-night, even if it's an ally. To tell the truth I feel like saying 'damn,' myself."

"'I cannot use such words, but . . . I thank thee, Madame,' as a venerable member of my sect is reported to have said, under somewhat similar conditions," smiled Daniel.

The side embankment of the track was now lined with a hundred ghostly figures, stamping about in an endeavor to get warm. Discontented and angry mutterings filled the air.

After many minutes word was passed back from lip to lip that the train was stalled for the rest of the night, but there was a small town a kilometre down the track, where rest and shelter *might* be found. Instantly the strange caravan, men of all ranks, and of no rank, mingled indiscriminately, was in motion, straggling down the dim track in single file. Daniel constituted himself escort to his late train companion, and, before the trip was ended, more than once silently thanked his Fates for endowing him with strong arms, since he carried her heavy suit case in addition to his own.

When they finally reached the little station the driver of a Red Cross ambulance stepped up and addressed the girl.

"Here's luck . . . for me, at least," she announced, as she turned to Daniel to relieve him of half his burden. "They knew at the hospital toward which I am headed that I was coming on this train, and, when they learned of the wreck, they anticipated my dilemma and sent a car to meet me here. Sorry that I can't ask you to come, too, but the driver informs me that everything is 'full up' there. Still, I guess that a man can find some sort of accommodation here — the place looks fairly sizable. Good-bye," she added as she clasped his hand firmly. "We may run into one another again, and

anyway, perhaps, considering the hour, you'll forgive me if I make an abominable pun, and tell you that you have truly been a 'Friend' in need tonight."

"Good-bye, and good luck," responded Daniel, but the half-hearted laugh with which he had answered her jest, died quickly away as he watched the conveyance disappear into the night, leaving him alone.

All the others had also been swallowed up in the gloom, and he did not know which way to turn, but the broken outlines of a black street invited him forward. A stumbling walk down a sidewalk, whose flagging was full of holes, finally brought him to a cross street. It was filled with a confusion of sounds, the rattle of wheels and accoutrements, the heavy breathing of horses, the crunch of plodding feet as they slumped through the half-frozen mud, the creak of straining harness, and an occasional word in some weary, or exasperated, voice. Like a phantom army, a battery of French seventy-fives was passing Northward through the shadows, toward the deeper shadows of the valley of death. Now and again the wan moonlight, as it filtered through a ragged break in the skyline where a house lay in ruins, half disclosed the forms of trudging men in ghostly blue, splashed with mud,

tired, bearded faces under steel helmets, or the long, lean barrels of the famous cannon.

The grim pageant brought the war suddenly very close to the lone watcher, and his imagination began to run riot. In his mind's eye he beheld the slow advance change to a headlong rush, the guns wheeled into battle position, the protecting pieces of burlap and canvas stripped from the muzzles, which began to belch forth distant death and destruction, while the silent night was filled with the wild clamor from their iron throats.

The battery passed from sight. The vision faded with it. The present flowed back, and brought to the man a realization of the fact that he was shivering, weary, and utterly without shelter for what remained of the night. He turned at random and found himself close beside a solitary sentry, and in his still halting French asked where he might find a place to sleep.

"No chance, I'm afraid, Monsieur. The town is overcrowded with troops and every spot twice filled. Perhaps at the *Foyer du Soldat* . . ." He shrugged his shoulders. "It is but a few steps down the road; you might try there."

Daniel thanked him, and moved in the direction indicated. All was dark, dismal. At last the sug-

gestion of a ruddy glow, showing through a tear in one oilcloth window of a long, low wooden barrack, proclaimed the presence of the possible refuge. He fumbled for, and found the crude latch, pulled open the door and stepped inside. At first he could see little but a patchwork of phantasmal shadows. Then the dim interior began slowly to take form, under the influence of the dull red gleam that came from the open door of a diminutive iron stove set in the middle of the room, and he made out two rows of rude tables and narrow benches down the sides and a single counter at one end. Many silent, overcoated forms lay about in varied postures on the hard tables, the counter and the packed dirt floor itself; others sat on the benches, bent forward in the sleep of exhaustion, with their heads buried in their arms. The air which filtered in through many a crack, was chill with the damp of the night outside, and heavy with unpleasant odors. As his eyes became more fully accustomed to the semi-obscurity, Daniel saw that posters, big and small, covered the rough walls, that strings of little flags and festoons of colored paper — like Christmas decorations — fluttered from the rafters, and that behind the counter stood a big caldron.

"So this," he thought, "is a *Foyer du Soldat* —

the Soldiers' Fireside, which, to the *poilu,* is a glimpse of heaven itself, poor chaps. And our Yankee boys growl over huts which are fairly luxurious by comparison! It's certainly true that the more one has the more he wants."

The friendly glow of the fire, as someone leaned forward and thrust a piece of stick into it, beckoned him to approach.

Two *poĭlus,* young in appearance, despite their unshaven faces, were seated before the stove on a little bench, still engaged in a low-toned conversation. One of them glanced up as Daniel drew near, smiled quickly, and greeted him with, "Good evening, — or better, good morning, — Monsieur. Move over a little, Henri," he added, addressing his companion.

The other obeyed. Daniel slid into the vacated place with a brief word of thanks, and held his stiffened hands to the welcome warmth.

"You are cold, then? But naturally. Perhaps a cup of hot chocolate . . . " The one who had been addressed as "Henri" loosened his own tin cup from the equipment pack which rested against his legs, vaulted lightly over a slumbering form on the counter, and drew a stream of brown liquid from the spigot at the bottom of the tin caldron. "It is cold now, but if you will wait for a mo-

ment . . . " He placed the cup on the cover of the little stove.

" Thanks. It is mighty kind of you," said Daniel gratefully.

" At your service. There is an American, as well as a French *Directeur* here, but they have both fallen asleep at last — they were serving the chocolate until after midnight."

" You are just passing through the village? "

" Yes, we are on our way to the Argonne front to help support your American infantry there, with our beautiful seventy-fives. Soon the *Boche* will be running again — is it not so, Jean? "

" But yes, assuredly," agreed the other, whom the question had aroused from a reverie, induced perhaps, thought Daniel, by the post card picture which he held in his hand. Now he returned it to Henri, and as the firelight illuminated the face of a young girl the American inquired casually, " Your fiancée, Monsieur? "

" Ah, no. It is my sister. Would you care to look at the picture? It is not a very good likeness of her."

He took the inexpensive card held out to him. The photography was crude, indeed, but it could not rob the face of its purity of line and sweetness, nor disguise the remarkable beauty of the big, dark

eyes which seemed to gaze straight up into his. Instinctively he turned the card over, and read the words, written in fine, slanting letters, "A mon cher frere. Joan."

"She must be very lovely, if this does not do her justice," he remarked as he passed it back after studying the face a moment more.

"Perhaps," the youth shrugged. "At least Jean, here, seems to think so. He has visited my home village since I have, and used our friendship to get acquainted with her. Oh, well, you can deny it if you like, but it will do you no good."

"And your home — is it far from here, Monsieur?"

"Not so very far, a hundred kilometres, perhaps. I live in a little village of the Vosges, called Mirabelle. And you, Monsieur? Do you come, perhaps, from New York?"

"No, I too live in a small village, in the State of Pennsylvania." Something caused Daniel to reciprocate the courtesy shown to him, and from an inner breast pocket he drew a small likeness of Faith, which he had finally succeeded in importuning her to have taken and to send him.

"Ah, she too is beautiful, Monsieur. It is the picture of your sister, likewise?"

"Yes."

The word sprang to Daniel's lips unbidden, perhaps as the result of unconscious force of habit, but although he tried to dismiss the matter from his mind as of no real account, it disturbed him, and this fact made him angry. He could not very well explain the situation — it was a bit beyond his French. "After all, what does it matter?" he reflected. It was a trivial thing and not actually a lie, in any sense, since he had had no intention to deceive. Yet somehow, it troubled his conscience, and Faith's calm eyes seemed in his mind to take on a look of pained reproach. Is it possible that there are occasional moments when we are granted the power of prescience, without realizing it?

"This is foolish; I'm making a mountain out of a mole hill," he decided, yet he hastily returned the picture to its resting-place over his heart, and reached for the cup of chocolate, which was now beginning to steam. The tin handle burned his fingers, and, absurd as it was, he experienced the feeling that he was being punished.

For a few moments longer the three chatted spasmodically, then sleep began to hang more and more heavily on Daniel's eyelids, and he finally excused himself, stumbled to the counter and edged into a space between two sleepers. Instantly he, too, was asleep, unconscious of the hard board, and

dreaming of a girl who sometimes seemed to be the one whom he had left behind. But fully as often the face which she turned towards him was that of the girl on the post card — Joan.

CHAPTER IV

THE RED RIVER

For seven weary days and weary nights, the red river had flowed in. Interminable, it seemed to Daniel. For seven days he had been living in the town to which they had sent him to prepare a way for the return of those who followed the paths of peace, and at the very moment of his arrival he had been caught in the crimson stream of war, whose source was in the forests of the Argonne, and the valleys of the Meuse. The day that he had reached his destination it had begun to wend its way into and through the partly ruined town, where a half-way dressing station had been hastily erected to serve as a sluice gate, and keep the tide of bleeding humanity from engulfing the base hospital below.

Daniel, who belonged to a Society already affiliated with the Red Cross, and who was, furthermore, in a sense a free lance for the time being, could hardly have escaped lending his aid as

stretcher bearer and general untrained orderly for the emergency, even if he had so desired. But, in fact, the plain call of duty and the cry of suffering interblending, had stirred him to the depths.

Day and night, with only a rare hour's sleep snatched at odd intervals, he had labored unremittingly, until his powerful body alternately cried out for rest, and obeyed his will as though it were something detached — an automaton. He was unbathed, bearded, blear of eye. The heart within him was numb with the fatigue that follows pity long sustained; his imagination was surfeited. Sometimes he found himself dazedly wondering if he were really that man who had once secretly yearned for the battle, the while steadfastly forcing himself to walk in the way of peace. True, he had not even yet seen the clash of arms which arouses men to the frenzy of beasts, though day and night the distant din of the combat had rung in his ears; but he had looked upon the other side of the shield until his soul had sickened at the sight.

In ambulances, in field motor cars, in huge jolting camions — even afoot — the red river had flowed in, to spread itself through the town like a dismal swamp before flowing on again.

Men in torn and filthy khaki, dyed crimson, composed it chiefly, but other men in filthy and torn

horizon blue, similarly discolored, were mingled with it.

A terrible toll was being taken by the gods of wrath, up yonder in the once verdant forests of the Argonne, and the once lovely valleys of the Meuse. And still the stream ran on and on, like a river of the Inferno, bearing on its breast the broken, bloody bodies of what had been strong men.

War! Mixed with his compassion, there grew day by day in Daniel's heart a bitter hatred against the Thing, and the power that had let it loose again on the world. Like a hidden fire it smouldered and burned constantly, torturing him, until he would sometimes clinch his fists with the wild desire to seize a weapon and cast himself into the fray, if only to perish, and so forget.

In the hour of his arrival he met once more the nurse who had been his companion on the train the night previous. At first he had not remembered her face, now seen in so different a setting. Then her smiling inquiry if he had slept well had brought recognition, and when the work overwhelmed them all, he had placed himself under her orders, and from then on served her with the faithfulness of a dog.

* * * * * * * *

Late in the afternoon of that seventh day, an

eddy from the swelling tide left before the door of the barrack where he labored, a new group of softly cursing, or pathetically dumb, sufferers. They were mostly American, but two wore the faded blue of France. One of them, with a sleeve dangling loosely, and his left arm supported in a hastily fashioned sling, was walking slowly by the side of a stretcher on which the other lay, motionless.

The face of the former seemed somehow familiar to Daniel, but he was far too occupied to give the matter more than a passing thought, and not until the one who lay so still on the canvas had been removed to a cot, and, with a low moan, turned his head so that his features were fully visible, did he remember. The latter, who was shaven now, and, in the deathlike pallor of his countenance, appeared pitifully young, was the lad who had befriended him in the *Foyer du Soldat* that dreary night; the other was the companion whom he had called "Jean."

Daniel had met him but that once, and then for a few moments only, yet it suddenly seemed to him as though, amid the endless stream of strangers, he had been brought face to face with a friend. The little incidents of that earlier night passed in procession before his mind's eye. He remembered the

vigorous ease with which the lad, now stricken down in the flower of his abundant youth, had vaulted the counter to procure a drink for him, and into his morbid thoughts was woven an oft-repeated verse from the gospel of the Apostle Mark: "For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in my name . . . verily I say to you that he shall not lose his reward." His reward! Was this, then, the just deserts of one so young, so strong and full of vitality — to be snatched away from mortal life, and the ones dear to him, by the hand of Death? The picture of Joan took form in his memory, and the large dark eyes seemed to hold a look of unutterable pain.

A doctor and his nurse were working swiftly; callously, it seemed to Daniel, although he had long since become accustomed to the sight of their efficient haste. The garments were already stripped from the slender torso, and the crude first-aid dressing from the muscular breast.

"Is it . . . is it serious, doctor?" asked the man, anxiously. "You see I know him."

"So?" The surgeon probed the wound tentatively. "Well, I'm sorry to have to tell you, but he can't live an hour. The piece of shell passed completely through the lung, and his vitality is nearly exhausted. Dr. Tuffier *might* save him, by

a miracle, but he would never live to reach Paris. We can do nothing for him, not a single thing. It's too bad — a fine lad." He turned away to another patient, while the nurse replaced the dressing and pulled a blanket over the unconscious form.

Jean had remained standing at Daniel's side, and, although the words were meaningless to him, he had understood the expression on the latter's face as the sentence was pronounced.

"He will die then, Monsieur?"

"Yes, within an hour, the doctor says," the American answered, dully.

There was silence for a space.

"Ah, God — the poor boy! We have for a long time been comrades; like brothers, Monsieur. We served the same gun. He had named it 'Joan' for the sister whom he so loves. A *Boche* shell burst directly in our midst, and every man of the gun crew was either killed outright, or wounded. Myself? It is nothing, a mere scratch on the arm. My lieutenant and I were the only ones not badly hurt."

As he spoke he nodded in the direction of a tall, fine-looking Frenchman, who might that instant have posed for a portrait of a hero, so striking did he look in his battle-stained uniform of a *sous-*

lieutenant, upon the left breast of which Daniel recognized, among several ribbons, the green and red one of the *Croix de Guerre* and the blood-red one of the *Legion d'Honneur.* His hand and head were bandaged. Now he approached them, and Jean came to attention, a little unsteadily, and saluted.

"Le Jeune?" the newcomer demanded, sharply.

"Dying, my lieutenant."

Under his tightly curled mustache, as black as a raven's wing, the officer's strong white teeth clicked together, as he bit off a muttered oath. Then he scowled at Daniel as though he bore him a personal grudge. "*Dieu,* these Americans!" he growled. "They have men aplenty, and so do not care how they throw lives away. If their country had been bled white through four years, as mine has been, it might be a different story, but now . . . You speak French, then?" he added, apparently reading the understanding in Daniel's eyes. "Let me tell you that it has been slaughter up there, Monsieur. Picture for yourself a deep wood filled with underbrush to the height of a man's head, and with *Boche* trenches and machine gun nests as thick as flies in summer. We sweep it clear at last — your countrymen, and our guns. We come to the outer edge. Before us lies a plain

a kilometre wide, flat as a table, and full of wire. Beyond it is a steep hill crowned by a village, shattered, yes, but still bristling with German guns. Two forests, like that through which we have just fought our way, flank it to right and left. That is Montfaucon. The command is 'Advance, and take it by assault,' after our guns have paved the way with steel. Well, it is taken, but behold!" He indicated the room, and its wounded and dying occupants, with a passionate sweep of his arm.

An American officer, also wounded, had been standing near-by and listening. Now he answered, with thinly veiled sarcasm, "Yes, it is taken, and the French high command said that it could not be, by assault . . . that it was impregnable."

"The words were relative, Monsieur. Nothing is impregnable in modern warfare, but we, at least, have had to learn that it is necessary to count the cost of such an enterprise. Your country has not learned that lesson . . . yet. But pardon me, Messieurs, I spoke hastily, and it is not for me to criticize. Perhaps it will help to hasten the end.

"Nothing can be done, then, to save this boy?" he added, addressing the doctor.

"Nothing, lieutenant."

"Ah, well, after all he is merely one more going beyond to join the million of his comrades. Take

your place in the line, and have your arm attended to." The command was addressed to Jean.

"But, my lieutenant, I am not badly injured. May I not stay with my comrade, until . . . ?"

His superior merely nodded sternly toward the waiting line of "walking cases," and Jean reluctantly turned to join it.

Left alone for the moment, Daniel bent over the lad whose slow return to consciousness made every breath a moan. The head stirred restlessly, the eyelids flickered, and the pale lips moved. Daniel believed that he caught the sound of a whispered word and bent closer.

"Jean."

"Yes, Henri," he answered.

"Jean . . . in . . . the pocket . . . tunic . . . picture . . . of Joan." The cryptic sentence was uttered very slowly, and with obvious difficulty. He arose, found the torn and stained coat and slipped his hand into the pocket where he had seen the boy place the picture-card. As his fingers came in contact with it, they instinctively drew away, for it was wet. Then he overcame his momentary repugnance and brought it to the light. There was an ugly, jagged hole through the card, but neither it, nor the dark stain, had marred the girl's sweet face.

Very gently he laid it in the boy's hand, and closed his nerveless fingers upon it.

"Take it . . . Give it . . . her. Promise." The whispering voice trailed off into silence. Then, haltingly, it began again. "Tell . . . tell them . . . all . . . " Daniel held his breath, for he thought that this time the tortured spirit had escaped its shattered prison. But the pulse in the lad's wrist still fluttered, and the voice came once more, like a mere echo of spoken words. "Tell them . . . I . . . died like a man . . . for . . . France."

Again silence followed. Daniel heard a footstep by his side, and, without turning his head, realized that Jean had stolen from his place in the waiting line, and rejoined him.

"Joan!"

Both men started visibly, for the word had sprung from the motionless lips, clear and strong, as though every last atom of physical energy in the stricken body had been summoned to assist its utterance. There was a mighty yearning, and a strange note of triumph, likewise, in the word.

Wonder on their countenances, they bent together over the still form.

"It is finished." Jean spoke in a low, choked voice.

"Yes. How strange it is that he should have called aloud like that, at the end. It was the name of his sister, was it not?"

"Yes. But I think that he was rather calling out to another Joan, the Immortal Maid. Men say that she stands at the portals of Paradise, with her young arms stretched out to welcome home the soldiers of her beloved France." Jean's voice was deep with awe. He crossed himself.

"Perhaps . . . perhaps he saw her standing there."

CHAPTER V

BY THE POST

"He is! He is!" shrieked Pierre, his face red and his childish voice high with anger.

"He is not," came the positive rejoinder, in a girl's thin tones.

"He is, I say."

"Then why is *he* not now leading the armies of France? Tell me that, thou little fool."

"Because he is not old enough; and I am not a little fool."

"No, thou art a great fool — like all children, and most grown-ups," came in an old, cracked voice. "And Rose is no better. Get thee home, evil one, before I lay my cane about thy legs for thus teasing the little man."

Joan, who had been listening with amusement inside the window, now glanced out in time to see her whom the village called "Old Barbette," a queer little deformed old woman, make a threatening pass with her stick at the frail white-faced girl, whose age might have been anything from

eight to fourteen years, for her small undernourished body suggested the former, and her elfish face the latter. Then she turned with a grimace, to shake her cane at Pierre, also. He started back so hastily that he stumbled and fell, and when the old hag broke into malicious laughter, the small soldier set up a wail. Joan knocked on the window-pane with her thimble and beckoned him in, whereupon he hastily dried his tears, and, with an April smile, turned and trudged up the little path to the cottage door.

When his small face, besmutted and streaked with tears, beamed through the doorway, Joan called, "Come hither, my little one, and tell me who is, and who is not what."

"It is my brother Jean who is a greater soldier than Marshal Foch. That Rose said that he is not, but he *is* — is it not so, Joan?"

"If we think so, thou and I, that should suffice. But why didst thou run from poor old Barbette? She was not angry with thee."

"I was afraid, for she is a witch, and if she touches one with her stick he turns into a toad," was the earnest explanation.

"Who has told thee that foolish story?"

"It is not foolish, it is true. My sisters and all the children say so, Joan."

"They are fooling thee, little Pierre. She is only a poor, and very lonely, old woman, and thou shouldst try to be kind to her, instead of calling out names, as I have heard thee and the others do. Come, wilt thou promise? If thou wilt I shall give thee a piece of newly baked bread."

"With sugar on it, my Joan?" the child demanded, appealingly.

"*Joan!*" came from the next room in the voice of her mother.

The girl made a little grimace, but answered, "No, not to-day, my little one, but something even better. I have been saving a tiny piece of sweetened chocolate for thee. Wait, and I will seek it in my room."

She was prevented by the sound of the postman's whistle, and, instead, flew to the door to receive the letter which the grizzled, one-armed veteran thrust into her eager hand.

"A letter from our Henri, a fat one, my mother. Come quickly, and I will read it aloud to thee," she cried.

"But, Joan, thou saidst that thou . . . "

"Canst thou not wait in patience for a few moments, little glutton? Here, here is the book at whose pictures thou lovest to look. See if thou canst not be quiet for a little while."

Joan's mother came hurrying in, as she tore open the yellow envelope with its military frank, and began to read:

"'My Dearest Mother, Father and Sisters,

"'This is the last letter that I shall be able to write to you for some time, I fear, for to-morrow my battery goes into action on the new front.

"'We have marched many kilometres since I last wrote you, and where we are now, there are a great many Americans, more than I have ever seen before, and every one says that we shall drive the *Boche* out of our beloved France soon, and bring an end to the war.

"'I pray the dear God that it may be so, for I am tired of it all, and long to be at home again. It is not that I do not like the fighting, when all is excitement, but now the cold winter is coming again, and the mud is already beginning to grow deep, and there is much discomfort. For myself, I do not care so much, but I pity the older men who have now fought four years and were some of them in the army for three before the war began. To be a soldier seven years! I hope that it will not be my fate.

"'The Americans complain bitterly of the mud, and I think that their great country must be one of perpetual sunshine and flowers. How would you like to have me take you there — all of you — after the war is finished? There is undoubtedly much

money to be gained there, for all Americans are rich — why, their *poilus* are paid more than five francs[1] a day, whereas we, who have fought so much longer, receive only 25 centimes,[2] and a short time ago received but five.[3]

"'Would it not be fine to be rich, as they are? But, no, I am only dreaming pleasant dreams, for we men must all stay and help our poor France, which will need us as much in peace as in war, she has lost so many of her sons already. Yes, I must stay, even though you write me that the cotton factory, where father and I used to work, now employs but sixty, instead of five hundred, since the coal and cotton are so hard to get. What is our country going to do, with her fields and cities in ruins, her machinery stolen from her, and no money with which to buy raw materials?

"'Ah well, perhaps thou, Joan, wilt go to America as the wife of some rich man. How wouldst thou like *that?*'

"I should not like it at all," asserted the girl, her eyes flashing. "I am French and can, perhaps, help bear the burdens of France as well as a man."

"What Jean says, is true," answered her mother, sorrowfully. "We shall need every man to help rebuild that which has been destroyed, after the *Boche* have been beaten."

[1] One dollar. [2] Five cents. [3] One cent.

Joan nodded, and continued.

"'Yes, it is hard to realize that we are so poor, when the Americans are all so rich. I have actually seen them lighting their cigarettes with fifty centime, and even with franc, pieces of our paper money, and laughing about it. Surely no Frenchman, no matter how much he possessed, would do that.'

"Why, it is a crime," cried Joan, angrily. "To think of their burning up good money when we need it so much, and have to work so hard for a few francs.

"'Yet, in spite of this, they insist that we overcharge them for everything. I have talked often about it with one who is encamped with us. He is of French descent and speaks our language fluently, and I tell him that, if it is true, our people cannot be blamed, and that he would do the same thing if he were in our place. He laughs, and says, "Perhaps." If another American ever comes to stay at our home, as did the one last spring, I hope that thou wilt remember this, my mother.'

"But no," said the girl, earnestly. "Henri reasons like a man, and from one standpoint is right, perhaps; but *we* would never do it, would we, my mother? Have not the Americans come to aid us

in the hour of our need, and is there anything that we should not do for them?"

"Do not interrupt thy reading so often, Joan. I want to hear the letter from my son."

"'They are splendid fellows — these Americans; brave, strong and full of fun. I admire them, although they, like all the world, have faults which I do not like. Sometimes I become angry when they speak slightingly of our women, but then I remember that they see few, except the bad ones, who are always near the camps and about the city streets. Still, it is not fair to judge all, by a small number, and have they then not the same kinds in America? But perhaps it is natural to think as they do.

"'Then there is another thing. When we drink a little *liqueur* we sip it slowly, for it is our habit, and besides, *liqueur* costs much money, but they toss off at one gulp a glassful that costs a franc, and then perhaps a second and a third. Then they are *zig-zag,* but instead of wanting to sing and dance, as we Frenchmen do, they often start to fight among themselves or with us, as though it were not enough to fight with the enemy. And many of our men are learning to do the same, which is sad.

"'While I am writing of the Americans; I met one the other night while we were on our way through XXXXXXX (deleted by censor). Very late in the night he arrived at the *Foyer du Soldat* where Jean and I were resting, and we had a very

pleasant talk with him. He is not a soldier, for he belongs to the Society of Friends, which does not believe in fighting, but . . . '

"Are they then cowards, that they will not fight?" exclaimed Joan. "If our Frenchmen had not fought, where would *we* have been to-day — what would the world have been? *I* should not have liked him, no matter how pleasant he might have been. Of that I am quite sure."

"And I am quite sure that thou art very young and foolish, Joan," her mother replied. "All men cannot fight. There are many other important things to be done, even in wartime, and who knows if they are not the harder to do, when the battle is calling."

"Perhaps. But if I were a man . . . " responded Joan, and her lips closed tightly.

"Continue, then."

"' . . .but they are here to help France in her task of reconstruction, and I have heard that they are doing wonderful things.' "

"There, what did I tell thee?" spoke her mother.

"' I showed him thy picture, Joan, but what he said about it I shall not tell thee. And he showed

me the likeness of his sister, also. She was very beautiful. Perhaps, after all, I shall go to America, who knows?'

"Now I am angry because he showed my picture to the man who would not fight," said Joan, with her dark eyes flashing.

"Well, why dost thou not read on?" demanded the other, as the girl paused. Joan flushed at the question and continued hastily, in a somewhat lower voice:

"'My comrade, Jean, can talk of nothing but thee, Joan, and of his little visit to Mirabelle. He joins me in sending to all of you the sincerest expression of regard, to which I add that of affection. Henri.'"

"The battle is again terrible. God grant that he come through it unharmed, my dear boy," whispered mother le Jeune.

"Why should we fear the contrary, my mother? He has gone through almost the whole of the war unscratched, and his letter shows that he is still well. Pierre, thou hast been very patient. Now I shall go to get the chocolate for thee." With a pat on his close-cropped hair, Joan departed, but as she mounted the narrow stairway she heard the

postman's whistle again, and paused to hear her mother greet him, and his reply, "A thousand pardons, Madame, but here is another letter which had been misplaced, so that I overlooked it when I passed the first time."

Singing blithely, the girl tripped down the stairs with the tiny square of precious chocolate in her hand, but as she entered the door she was brought to a sudden stop.

Her mother was seated in a chair with her thin arms stretched out across the table and her head buried upon them. An open letter was desperately clenched in one hand.

"Mother!"

"Oh, my God, my God, my God! Henri, thy brother . . . my only boy . . . "

"What has happened? What is the matter? Tell me quickly, mother." Joan ran forward and dropped on her knees beside the silently shaking form.

"Dead."

"Dead? Oh, no! oh, merciful God, no! Why, it cannot be. See, I have his own letter in my hand."

The other passed her the brief official notice. She read it through with eyes which grew bigger and bigger, although no tears came.

The unnatural silence in the little room was broken by Pierre's whisper, half frightened, half imploring, "Joan, may I not have my chocolate? See, you are squeezing it all up in your hand."

CHAPTER VI

NOVEMBER THE ELEVENTH

PEACE!

Or if peace itself had not actually come, at least the fighting was ended for a time.

Like a fire, running wild through dry grass, spread the news that the rumored armistice had really been declared, an hour before noon. The very winds paradoxically bore the tidings, for, since that hour, they had ceased to come weighted with the rumblings of the battle, which had now receded far to the north.

As was the case with most of the grim fighters, Daniel found himself too weary of body, too soul-encompassed by ugly sights, to respond to the announcement other than by drawing a deep breath of relief — which sounded like a sigh. There is such a thing as being, both physically and in point of time, too near a great event to appreciate its real significance. So, at first, was it with him, upon the cessation of hostilities. It meant merely the end of the red tide which still flowed in, although in a

diminished stream, for its course had been in part diverted to a more northerly channel.

This thought, however, brought its own reaction. As a man who has valiantly scaled the sides of a precipice, unfalteringly, and without realization of his danger and fatigue, so long as his eyes are fixed on the rocky ascent, sometimes sways and becomes weak with dizziness upon reaching his goal, so it was with Daniel. Sleep, like a potent drug whose effects have been stayed for a time, now overpowered him, and he stumbled blindly as he walked to his cot bed, upon which he threw himself fully dressed.

Neither joy over the end of the slaughter, nor any of the gloomy forebodings that perhaps a terrible mistake had been made in that fateful hour, which were later to be forced upon his mind, then disturbed him.

But, tired as he was, refreshing rest was denied him. His dreams carried on the nightmare work in which he had so long spent himself, unsparingly. Sleep made a bungling job of her knitting, and the noise of each passing vehicle caused him to start, with the vague idea that he was needed outside to assist in the removal of its cargo of halt, lame and blind. An hour of this doubtful repose was brought to a termination by the rattling stop of a motor car,

and the sound of his own name spoken outside the barrack building. Like a call to battle, it brought Daniel to his feet, wide awake, despite his weariness. His legs carried him unsteadily to the door.

By the side of an army automobile stood four French officers, their left sleeves marked with the *galons* of a captain, two lieutenants and an aspirant. All of them were talking and laughing hilariously, and Daniel had no need of being highly trained in deduction in order to decide that champagne had taken the place of the mild *vin ordinaire* at their recent *dejeuner*.

One of them hailed his appearance with an enthusiastic, "Ha, my young puritanical friend, behold the 'day of glory has arrived,'" whereupon his three companions took up the words, and chanted the rest of the *Marseillaise* full-throatedly, to the hearty applause of several doughboys and hospital attendants, who formed an amused group of listeners.

The one who had addressed Daniel by name, was the lieutenant whose acquaintance he had first made on the dark afternoon when the brother of the unseen girl, Joan — the photograph of whom he still carried with that of Faith over his heart — had briefly reentered his life only to depart therefrom, forever. The continued presence of that picture had

more than once troubled his conscience, for he knew that he might, and perhaps should, have passed it over to Jean, for whom it had obviously been intended. And he could not comfort himself with the excuse that it had not been possible. The young *poilu's* wound had proved to be more serious than he would himself admit, and for several days he had been kept in the rude hospital, burnt up with fever, before the inflammation had been conquered.

It was during those days that Daniel had grown to know Lieutenant Villier, for the Frenchman had come several times to have his own minor injuries dressed, and never had he failed to stay and talk for a little while with his orderly, Jean, always evidencing that close and friendly *esprit de corps*, which exists between French brothers-in-arms of whatever their rank, to a far greater degree than in any other army in the world. And at these visits he had also fallen into the habit of chatting with Daniel. For some reason, he had seemed to take an instantaneous fancy to the young auxiliary worker — perhaps it was the psychological attraction of Nature's opposites, for he was ordinarily as gaily volatile as Daniel was serious. In any event he obviously enjoyed conversing with the Friend, and found keen amusement in leading him on to haltingly expressed comments upon the different aspects of French life

which were at variance with what he had known at home.

There had been times, during these discussions, that Daniel had come to believe that the Frenchman could not be serious, forgetful of his decorations for bravery, and his bitter comments at the moment of their first meeting, but the American's growing irritation over the other's perpetual levity in dealing with the most serious subjects, had been definitely dispelled one afternoon, as the result of a chance remark which he had himself made.

Villier had been laughingly quizzing him, before several others, until his habitual self-restraint had given place to exasperation at the man's apparently frivolous attitude toward everything in life.

"Ah, Monsieur, but why blame *me?*" the lieutenant had cried. "All the world knows that the French are a light race, is it not so?"

"Yes, they were very light . . . at Verdun," Daniel had retorted sarcastically.

To his intense surprise, the lieutenant had gripped his hand hard, and for an instant the American had looked through the windows of his soul, and found there a depth which he had not suspected.

"Ah, Verdun," Villier had half whispered, and turned quickly away.

"It was at Verdun that he won the *Medaille*

Militaire — for exceptional bravery, Monsieur," explained Jean, when Villier had departed.

Thereafter the strange friendship had grown apace.

* * * * * * * *

"What, you asleep at this hour, and on *this* day?" the lieutenant demanded, as Daniel appeared. "*Mon Dieu,* these Americans, they have utterly no sense of the appropriate! Messieurs, behold the young moralist of whom I have spoken to you often. He has appointed himself my conscience, to remind me daily that — in the words of one of his own poets —

"'Life is real! Life is earnest!'

"Ah, but you cannot fool me, Monsieur Steele. Solemnity sits ill upon your countenance, my Christian Friend, for your eyes confess a devil within. Come, for to-day you must doff the dun cloak of morality and don the many-colored mantle of frivolity, with us."

As he chattered, he pulled the half-laughing, half-protesting American toward the waiting automobile.

"Do you shrink? Have no fear then, my pure one; you cannot be led very far from the paths of rectitude where we are going to take you, for there are no women there. My young friend is mortally afraid of the women — or rather, he is mortally

afraid of himself, when they are around," he went on, addressing the laughing company.

Daniel was not in a mood for jests, and answered rather curtly, "I'm not worried. I haven't seen any of your French women yet, who could play the siren to my mariner." But instantly he was contrite and apologized for his discourtesy.

"Oh, that is all right, I'm not offended," laughed the lieutenant, breezily. "I am well aware of the idea that most Americans have gained of our women, judging all by their association with the *grisettes* of the cities, and the camp followers, neither of which exist in America, the land of the Pure, of course," he added with a tinge of sarcasm. "Perhaps some day you'll learn that they exist for, as well as off, our visitors, by whose bounty they live in luxury, whereas they would starve to death if they depended upon their countrymen. To be sure, passions of all kinds grow hotter under the fiery breath of war, and we Latins are — I rejoice to say — a race somewhat more warm-blooded than you frigid Anglo-Saxons; but just wait until I introduce you some day to a *real* girl, perhaps some village lass with the fascination of true simplicity added to that which is natural with every woman of France — then see if you do not have to keep a tight check-rein on your plunging heart. I have an

idea that you are human inside, Monsieur Steele, despite the meaning of your surname — if I have not forgotten the little English that I learned at the University."

This time Daniel could not but join in the laughter at his expense.

" But to-day you need not be afraid, as I have told you. We go to join in the celebration of the full deliverance of Verdun, the Portal of France — which my comrades and I helped to hold for over a year. We have secured a permit to enter the city, and it is our wish that you accompany us. What do you say? "

Lieutenant Villier's spirit was infectious. The weariness seemed to slip from Daniel, and, almost before he realized it, he had allowed himself to be pulled inside the car, by boisterous friendly hands. Why, after all, should he not go? His conscience was his only dictator, he had surely earned brief recreation, it was a fete day the world around, and the opportunity was verily one of a kind which knocks but once in a life-time — it never *could* happen again. To cap all the thoughts which flashed through his mind, was the magic-bearing name VERDUN, which, in his imagination, had long stood as the epitome of romantic faith and unfaltering courage.

An instant later they were jolting eastward, over roads that momentarily grew rougher and more shell-pocked.

"It will be time enough if we reach the city toward evening," said Lieutenant Villier. "Let us make a detour to the north, and show the man of peace a little of what was, only yesterday, one of the great battlefields of all time. Besides, he has come to help our France build anew on the shattered foundations of the old, and it will be an opportunity for him to learn, first-hand, something of the magnitude of the task. Drive to Chattancourt and thence via Charney," he ordered the chauffeur. "The road is scarcely a Champs Elysees, but it should at least be passable for a 'flivver.'" He pronounced it "fleever."

In time they reached, and crawled up, a long barren slope, and, at a word from Villier, the car was brought to a stop on the summit. Instantly, the continued hilarity of the party was stilled, as the scene stretching far before them brought to the minds of all, except Daniel, fresh recollections of the horrors which it had held for them in the days that were past, and which could never wholly be erased. Without fully understanding, the American felt and shared their mood, although all that *his* eyes saw was a wide stretch of drear November landscape, backed

by distant hills and broken by an occasional tiny hamlet, too far away for him to realize that none but Death dwelt within its walls. Later, his eyes made out stretches of tangled barbed wire at intervals on the billowy surface of the nearer fields, and, far ahead, patches of silver which marked the serpentine windings of the Meuse through the low flat valley. Just beyond it, a thread-like scar of black showed the course of a dried-up canal, whose tiny bordering trees were only half standing.

A speechless moment followed; then his host stretched out his arm toward the left, and said, "The hill yonder is Number 304. Just to the right of it '*le Mort Homme*' — Deadman's Hill."

The announcement stirred Daniel's mind to a recollection of the newspaper stories which he had read at college, nearly three years before — how, on the once heavily wooded slopes of that historic hill, two mighty armies had swayed back and forth, back and forth, like giants locked in a death grapple, with their daily gains or losses measured in yards.

"'Deadman's Hill'—well named, indeed!" The lieutenant spoke his bitter musings aloud. "Do you chance to know how many of the flower of France laid down their lives on those slopes, Monsieur?"

Daniel shook his head in mute denial.

"More than *fifty thousand,* Monsieur Steele."

Fifty thousand, dead for France on that one small hill, and as many more clad in the gray-green of the enemy on the other side! "It is horrible," he answered, in awed tones.

Lieutenant Villier laughed, but without mirth. He shrugged his shoulders. "Fifty thousand? A mere bagatelle as we have had to count our dead. In the defence of Verdun we sacrificed ten times that number in killed alone, but *they did not pass,* those *Boche,* and they left seven hundred thousand to rot there. Oh, we who fought on Deadman's Hill, and on the slopes below the fort *de Vaux,* know the full meaning of the words, 'wholesale slaughter.' Remembering that, perhaps you will forgive me for speaking as I did about the attack on Montfaucon. It was not that I lacked in admiration for the splendid courage of our American allies, but that I could not forget that France has lost nearly a million and a half dead, already, and your troops less than the number of ours who fell on that one hill yonder."

"Yes, I understand," Daniel rejoined. "Well, it is ended, thank God. The world can now beat its swords into plowshares."

"For a time it is ended, yes, and none too soon for France. To-day we can laugh and sing, and turn our eyes once more toward the pleasures that Peace holds in her lap. But do not think that

France is foolish enough to beat her victorious swords into anything. There, over those dark hills, the filthy serpent still lies, scotched, but not yet killed. Unless a miracle occurs, our sons will have to gird their loins for battle as did their sires.

"And when France ever puts her trust in the word of a Boche — she deserves to die!"

CHAPTER VII

WHERE HISTORY WAS MADE

"We will go on," he said at length, but in spite of his declared intention of forgetting the past, filled with tragic shadows, and thinking only of the sunlight breaking through the clouds ahead, the memory-provoking sights on every side proved too strong for Lieutenant Villier. A man may try to think and to talk of anything but war while he is in the midst of it, but when it is over his thoughts irresistibly revert, and at times must be given expression. So it was that afternoon, and as the car started its jolting descent towards Chattancourt and the river valley, he and his companions fell to reminiscing instinctively, and Daniel sat silent and enthralled. For the talk of these men who had lived history, brought home to him, more than any printed story ever could, the reality of what had seemed like a shuddering dream.

The lieutenant began by pointing out a hill beyond, and slightly lower than that of the Dead

Men. "There is Cumières, where his all-mightiness, the Crown Prince, had his famous concrete dugout, from the security of which he was to view the fall of Verdun that was to end the war. His eyesight proved remarkably bad," he added with a short laugh. "They tell me that it is not so big or so magnificent as fable has already begun to picture it, but it was perfectly safe. Oh, yes, his precious life was never in any danger there, and what did he care for the lives of others? 'I have another million men whom I am willing to sacrifice to take Verdun,' he said. Do you remember, my captain, how they broke like gray-green storm waves over the crest of the ravine before Douaumont?"

The one addressed nodded, his eyes flashing in recollection.

"Our *poilus* in the trenches mowed them down, time after time, until the barrels of their machine guns became too hot to touch, and they fell asleep from sheer exhaustion. Oh, he was a noble strategist, was Willie. Look, there is Douaumont, the highest elevation on the horizon ahead — no, a little more to the right. Of course you cannot see the fort, for it is all underground, except for a conical steel turret or two. Even the high granite-walled moat has been obliterated by the shell fire now. *Brrr,* but it's cold and horribly damp inside those corridors,

yet men actually lived there, month after month, scarcely ever seeing the light."

"The *Boche* finally succeeded in capturing it, didn't they?" queried Daniel, not quite sure of his history.

"Yes, by means of a trick, but it took them seven months of constant fighting to get it, the fort *de Vaux,* and work their way step by step down the slope on this side to the village of Fleury — I'd like to set you down at the crossroads there and ask you to locate that hamlet, which once housed seven hundred souls. One year's growth of grass and weeds has completely covered every vestige of what remains of it," said the captain.

"Ah, but you haven't told him the glorious sequel to the tale, my captain," interrupted Villier. "When our General Petain was able to assemble something approximating an equal number of troops to that of the enemy, and sufficient ammunition to warrant an attempt to recapture them, we accomplished it in *just three hours.*"

"Yes, but you should get Lieutenant Villier to tell you about the fight in the trenches outside the fort *de Vaux.* It was there that the fiercest battle of the whole war was waged. Do you remember how they came through the pass from the valley of the Woevre?"

"Am I likely ever to forget it?" The lieutenant turned to Daniel. "I'm no historian, and if you want to read a masterly story of that inferno, you must get Captain Bordeaux's book, '*Les Derniers Jours du Fort de Vaux*,' but if you wish I will give you an outline of the fight — you may then be better able to appreciate the story of the immortal city toward which we are headed. I do not know whether or not it is so in your case, but I have found that many of your countrymen imagine that the so-called battle, which was a real war in itself, was actually fought in the town, and they speak of the historic Citadel as the rock against which the German tide dashed and broke in vain. That is not a fact, of course. They never got nearer than five kilometres [1] from Verdun, and the Citadel, with its seventeen kilometres of chambers and corridors, was used only as a rest and *ravitaillement* center, but without it the battle would have been lost. It served its appointed purpose — a combined headquarters and gigantic bakery — for when not a soul could have lived in the rain of shells which daily fell upon the town, only one struck home in what the world calls 'The Underground City,' and it merely burst in an entrance, killing and wounding a few men."

He found an old envelope in his pocket, and, on

[1] A kilometre is five-eighths of a mile.

its back, drew with his fountain pen a crude plan of the town and its environs, elucidating as he worked.

"The *Boche* launched their first attack against Verdun here at the north, but it was stopped on that line of hills yonder; they then suddenly changed their tactics, and drove in overwhelmingly from the southeast — the plain of the Woevre, as the captain has said — striking northward at forts *Douaumont* and *de Vaux*. Eventually they swamped us by the sheer weight of numbers and artillery fire, but they came like cattle driven to the slaughter. Some day, perhaps, you will be able to visit that battlefield and for yourself see the scene which, for years to come, cannot but hold a thrill of horror and awe for the beholder, but now try to imagine these scratchy lines as representing the sides of two steep hills overlooking a deep ravine. They are crowned with powerful modern forts — *Douaumont* and *de Vaux* — two of the thirty which almost encircle the town. Opposite them rises another steep elevation, and our trenches run along the slopes on both sides of the deep intervening valley. Four years ago it was part of a beautifully wooded park, with a pretty little pond in the bottom — the '*étang de Vaux*,' here.

"It was into this *cul de sac* that the Crown Prince

THE MAP DRAWN BY LIEUTENANT VILLIER

drove more than a million men, in repeated close formation assaults.

"To-day, not a tree, and scarcely the remnant of one, remains, and the ground for square mile on square mile appears like the surface of a choppy sea, with the shell holes, often as big as the cellar of a house, so close together that you needs must step from one to another in walking across it. No man living can even guess how many shells fell there. but it is said that in one day almost forty thousand landed on the fort *de Vaux* alone, and it has been estimated that every millimetre of that sector was turned over fifteen times by the steel plow of the Sower Death. Neither French nor *Boche* could bury their dead, nor would it have availed anything to do so, for bodies were torn up, and re-interred, time and time again by the hurricane of iron.

"To me it seems that no other spot in all the world could possibly serve so perfectly as a scene for a Doré to paint as hell, as that pool *de Vaux,* now sunk amid surroundings of utter barrenness and desolation — ruined trenches like ugly gashes on the earth, twisted wire, shell holes innumerable, and its own waters green with horrid, stinking scum, since its slimy bottom is the last resting-place of three thousand dead *Boche,* for whom it was the source of the river Styx. Oh, it's a pretty sight, even

now; and I have lain in the trenches above it through many a night when the earth quaked and shuddered ceaselessly, and seen its troubled waters red with blood and the reflection of ruddy lights, while the air above — reeking with poisonous gases — was filled with flying death, a veritable storm of steel which swept it, hour after hour, to the accompaniment of unceasing thunder and lightning never equaled by the elements."

He paused, and Daniel had only to close his eyes to see the scene in all its hideousness and horror. Was it possible that mortal men had lived through such a thing, and come forth sane? Strangely enough the calm words of the Elder came to his mind: "The Lord in His infinite wisdom never lays upon us burdens heavier than we can bear." And one who had been through that valley of death was speaking calmly beside him again.

"Douaumont fell first, after the trenches had all been wiped away; it was retaken, and lost again. Then came the fight for Vaux — a struggle that eclipses any tale of ancient romance, Monsieur. The *Boche* swarmed around and on top of the fort at last, but so long as the west side was free the beleaguered city did its valiant best to get sustenance and succor to the doomed defenders. Night after night a meager supply of food and ammunition was

borne to them by volunteer runners, who, in order to reach the fort, had to cross another deep ravine, every millimetre of which was swept by the fire from hundreds of German machine guns, placed on both sides and in the opening to it. This is now called the 'Ravine of the Dead,' for ten Frenchmen fell there to every square metre [1] of ground.

"Then the *Boche* cut this line of communication, also; they swarmed by thousands over the hidden fort, like ants on an ant hill. Inside, its small but desperate band of defenders fought on and on, for days which must have seemed each an eternity, stifled with nauseous gases and the smell of their dead which they were unable to bury, and with the cries of the wounded, whom they could not care for, ever in their ears. With little food, and almost no water — scarcely more than a mouthful a day for each man entombed in that living hell—they fought from corridor to corridor, on wet and slippery floors, with rifles, with hand-grenades, with knives, against the most hopeless of odds and without a single comforting hope of relief. Then . . . it, too, fell."

All of the party were silent for a moment.

"Tell him about the buried trench west of Douaumont, also," the captain suggested.

"How can I?" Villier threw his hands wide with

[1] A metre is slightly more than a yard.

a gesture of despair. "I'm not a Homer, and that tiny piece of *terrain* was the scene of an epic. But the bald facts are these: imagine again a single narrow trench, defending the fort's left flank — a shallow cut in a flat field, exposed to the full blast of the furious storm. It is held tenaciously by the remnant of a decimated regiment of French colonial troops — bearded, haggard, weary unto death. For God knows how long, no others have been sent to relieve or reinforce them.

"Through the withering blast comes a messenger, creeping alone across the stubbled field. They see him with eyes weak and burning from the 'tear gases,' and hope is born again in their hearts. Does he then bear the tidings that they are to be relieved; that they can find rest? His message is, 'You must hold this trench at all costs; France cannot help you.'

"It spells death to the last man; they look at one another, but there is no sign of faltering on their dark and grimy faces. One by one the survivors fall. The enemy is desperate. Are his swelling plans to be ruined by this pitiable handful of fools, who do not know enough to realize that they are beaten?

"He turns all the furies of hell on the thin dark line, which marks the doomed trench. The earth erupts, the trench is utterly obliterated from the

landscape. One instant it is there, barring his path; the next, nothing remains to show where it had been. Nothing? But no; at regular intervals, here and there, appears a bayonet, the end of a gun, like the first outcropping of armed men such as those which sprang from the dragon's teeth in the ancient legend. That is all; but no monument will ever be needed to mark that hallowed spot, for *they* show where valiant men were buried alive, standing bravely erect at the posts they would not quit.

"Oh, the fields about Verdun are thick with memorials like that. Lately I have thought often of words which I learned in translation when I was at school — part of a speech by your Civil War President, Lincoln, at the Gettysburg cemetery. 'We cannot dedicate, we cannot consecrate, we cannot hallow this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here have consecrated it far beyond our poor power to add or detract.'

"Do you wonder that we of France feel the same about the fields of Verdun, and that the city itself stands, and shall always stand, for us, a perpetual memorial to an accomplished ideal?"

CHAPTER VIII

WITHIN THE PORT OF FRANCE

The way grew rougher, more pitted with marks of bursting shell. The ragged remnants of small towns, and desolated hamlets, began to appear at intervals along the valley road.

Towns, hamlets? "They are giant corpses which have fallen athwart the highway to lie in contorted postures; mere stripped skeletons of things in which once dwelt the living spirit of a home," thought Daniel, whose imagination had been quickened and morbidly colored by Lieutenant Villier's words.

About them spread the waste fields, brown and sere, which shivered as the cold November wind blew fitfully over them, laden with the river damps. Here and there stood what had once been precious trees bringing forth their fruit or yielding their shade, now poor, dead, decapitated things.

Marre and Charny they passed, as through gigantic graveyards yawning wide at the Trump of Doom. From the latter, Villier pointed out Bras

across the cold gray river. It looked like the bony framework of some prehistoric monster, with its denuded and broken ribs piercing the gray sky. Thence through Thiercourt they rode, finding it less demolished, but made up, nevertheless, of disemboweled houses, and finally began to climb the steep ascent which was crowned with the twin towers of Verdun's twelfth-century Cathedral.

The first near view of them drew an exclamation of surprise from the American. "Why, they are still intact! Look, only one piece of the balustrade has been shot away. But I understood that the city was in ruins."

"The old towers stand, yes, like sentries symbolizing the unconquerable spirit of the place. It is no less than a miracle, Monsieur, for during three years they have been the especial target of thousands and thousands of *Boche* shells, the last of which fell, without doubt, only a few hours ago. A pure 'spite' bombardment has been carried on daily, I'm told, since early in July. The fiends have known that the Port of France was forever closed to them, since that August day, two years ago, when we drove them far back over the hills to the north and east, and yet they have been pouring steel into the already ruined city, with absolutely no military object to be gained. It was pure wanton destruction.

"There, Monsieur, behold a part of the western wall of the historic Citadel, which was actually commenced in pre-Roman days."

Daniel gazed at the wall of heavy gray masonry, now green with patches of ancient moss, which showed like an outcropping of a granite ledge in the tree-clad hillside, and tried to picture the miles of dim caverns stretching behind it into the bowels of the earth, and the far distant past, as the modern car crawled on low speed up the winding road, now little better than a rocky path.

It reached the summit, and swung sharply to the left.

Before them stood a row of ruined houses, curving down the hill, and pierced by a narrow, arched portal — the Black Gate, a rich relic of medieval times that had been providentially spared by the hand of Fate. Daniel caught himself in the act of drawing his breath with a sharp intake, and murmuring the words which had rung through France as a battle-cry, "*On ne passe pas.*" Through it, as in a frame, he saw the quaint picture of a little street piled with rubbish — broken beams and scattered stones, mortar and tile — but, lining the road, on either side, were what seemed to be substantial houses, unhurt. A vague sense of disappointment

THE BLACK GATE

possessed him. Was this, then, a famous city of ruins?

The feeling quickly vanished, however, for, as the car crawled on its tortuous course through the debris and he came abreast of each dwelling in turn, he could see the sky outlined in every window. Mere shells they were, mere husks of homes, roofless, and with their interiors filled with litter, from which everything of value had long since been stripped. They stood erect, still, but like corpses which stared into the familiar street with sightless eyes.

Again they turned a corner to the left, and now full devastation burst upon his view. To the right the Cathedral raised its unscathed walls, symbolically, but it was roofless, and under the shadow of its towers lay the pitiful remains of the once beautiful cloister of Saint Margaret's College; and opposite appeared what had formerly been spacious, substantial residences, now looking for all the world like the discarded doll houses of some race of giant children, since whole façades were missing, and their three-storied interiors were exposed to every curious eye. Fragments of furniture hung here and there, suspended half in space on sagging floors, or bare protruding rafters.

"Now, look below you on the left." The lieutenant's voice broke grimly into his reverie, as the

chauffeur steered wide to avoid a gaping hole in the street beside the Cathedral wall, where a recent shell of huge dimensions — a 420mm. perhaps — had viciously torn its way into a vaulted cellar beneath.

Daniel obeyed. On the downward sloping hillside to the north appeared wrack and ruin enough to satisfy even the most ghoulish Hun, for naught remained of acres of homes but tumbled walls and heaped up piles of mortar and stone, splashed with the red of bricks like spattered blood.

"Do you wonder that the underground chambers of the Citadel were good enough for us to occupy during our brief periods of rest, even though we were shut off from the light of day? To be sure, all of the city is not demolished like that section, for *it* lay in the direct path of the hurricane of steel that swept down from the North, but I'll wager that not over twenty houses remain unscathed in this city, which was once the home of more than twenty thousand civilians, with thousands of garrisoned troops in addition."

The streets were filled with many American, and a few French soldiers, swinging arm in arm over the piles of debris, laughing, jesting, singing. Their behavior struck Daniel as a profanation. It was not that he begrudged them their day of joyous relief, but he found that he wanted to be alone with his

imagination in this city of memories. And when his conductors were hailed by a group of passing acquaintances, and invited to celebrate the auspicious meeting with wine and song, he seized the opportunity to excuse himself from the party, on the plea that he did not drink, and wanted to view the ruins more closely. They acquiesced in his mood, after the usual show of hospitable insistence, and agreed to meet him at nightfall, with the Cathedral as the *rendezvous*.

He was content to be alone, to wander through the twisting streets, so rich in history and tradition, and to people them with men of his own imagining — not Yanks and *poilus,* gay with wine and song, but warriors, grim with the sweat and dust of battle, plodding their way wearily in from the distant fields under cover of the protecting night, to find rest and refuge in the bowels of the earth.

For an hour, undisturbed by passing throng or military police, who, to-day, greeted him merely with a friendly glance and nod, Daniel wended his way through cluttered streets, and up and down steep alleys, their well-worn stone steps shadowed by antique houses which leaned toward each other above them, like gossiping neighbors. Many a demolished domicile he entered to poke aimlessly through the wreckage within, and construct ro-

mances from the fragments of what had once been the household goods of happy families, now vanished whither? There was no one to prevent him, and as yet none of the doors bore the placards which were later to inform the passer-by, in French and in English, that "THE OWNER BEING BACK IT IS VERBIDDEN TO GET IN."

He trod gingerly at first, for there was danger at almost every step, but in time familiarity with jumping holes in floors bred carelessness, and as he was edging his way along a narrow path, made by a substantial beam, on the second story of one pitiable travesty on a home, his foot struck a protruding nail, he lost his balance, jumped wildly, and landed on the sagging floor beyond.

There he lay in the mortar dust, hanging half over the edge and almost afraid to attempt to pull himself forward, so frail was his support. Daniel's heart seemed to crowd up into his throat, and it, with the dust that filled his mouth, made it almost impossible for him to cry out. But there was no need of his doing so. A young *poilu* came bounding up the shaky stairs, calling to him to hang on, and an instant later two strong hands had grasped his wrists and pulled him to safety.

Daniel rolled over, and sat up, breathing hard; then he glanced up at the face of his timely rescuer,

who was nursing his left arm, and upon whose face there appeared a look of pain. It yielded to one of astonishment and the American's countenance reflected it as he scrambled to his feet, and held out his hand, exclaiming, "Jean! Is it you who saved my life?"

The Frenchman showed his white teeth in a glad smile, as he eagerly grasped the outstretched hand. "Ah, is it then really my friend the American? It is a joy to see you again, even looking like that."

Daniel glanced ruefully down at his dust-covered uniform, and smiled sheepishly.

"Yes, it is I, but do not thank me for saving your life — at the most you would only have had an unpleasant fall, and received a few bruises. You must excuse me for laughing, Monsieur, but your face . . . it is covered with powder like a chorus girl's."

"Your arm! I forgot that it had been wounded. Did you hurt it badly pulling my hulking body out of the hole?"

"Only for an instant, the pain has gone now, and I am very glad that I was down stairs and so heard your fall, for few soldiers pass through this side street."

"What a coincidence it is . . . you, of all people, here."

"That I found *you* in this house is a coincidence, yes, but not that I am here. Behold the home of Jean Harent." He stretched out his arms in a comprehensive gesture.

"This . . . your house?"

"But yes, at least it was once the happy home of my family. For many, many generations the Harents have been born, and lived and died within these broken walls. And now . . ."

He stopped, and Daniel asked gently, "Your family? They are not, then . . . ?"

"The father and mother . . . dead, yes. He was killed in the first battle of the Marne, Monsieur, and then the mother died of grief. She was old, you see," he hastened to add, as though an apology were necessary. "My sisters, Marie and Georgette, and the little baby brother Pierre, are all refugees in a village that has escaped the destroyer. Ah, but I forget. Monsieur himself has heard of the place. It is Mirabelle, where dwells the family of my friend who is now dead."

At the simple words it seemed to Daniel as though the picture which rested over his heart actually burned, yet he could not bring himself to mention its possession. Besides, he had made a mental vow somehow to return it, himself, to Joan, and so re-

deem the promise that he had made, even though it had been demanded under a mistake.

"But how came you here to-day?" he asked, by way of changing the subject.

"I am still on sick leave, but now quite well enough to be about, thanks to the good Lord. I longed to be in my old home, my triumphant Verdun, on this day of days, and was able to beg a ride hither in the motor car of one of your kind compatriots. And you, Monsieur?"

"I, too, came from X . . . by automobile, as the guest of Lieutenant Villier and some of his friends."

"My lieutenant? And he is here, also? Is it not strange; it is the third time that our paths have met in different places. Somehow I have a feeling that we shall see each other again, perhaps be friends, Monsieur."

"But surely I hope that we are friends now — especially after what has just happened. Is it not so?"

"Ah, but yes, Monsieur." Instinctively Daniel's hand went out anew, and Jean's came to meet it. "I wish that I might offer you a more hospitable welcome on this, your first visit to my house. Indeed, if Monsieur will attend I will try to purchase some wine . . . but I forget, you do not drink the wine."

"No, and I will gladly take the word for the deed.

Come, tell me something about your former life here, and your little ones."

"There is little to tell, Monsieur. Before my father — he was nearly fifty — was called out with the other reservists to help stem the German tide along the banks of the Marne, and I, myself, joined the colors, we lived a very simple, a very peaceful life. I was learning his trade, that of wood carver, for, as you may know, Verdun has long been famous for its wood carving, as well as its beer, spirits and *confiture*.

"It was in this room that I slept with my elder brother, who also has died that France might live. Our high-post bedstead stood in that corner. Now it is gone, but I do not mourn its loss, for perhaps some other weary *poilu* had need of it to rest in, or perhaps he and his comrades were cold and needed wood to make a fire." The words were simply uttered, and touched Daniel's heart and his imagination. "Yonder in the next room slept my little sister Marie, who was only seven when they had to leave our home in such haste, and Georgette who was four. Pierre was still but a baby, and slept with the mother and father in the room below. It was only three years ago, Monsieur, for it was in February of nineteen sixteen that the *Boche* first attacked Verdun, after failing to reach Paris from the

north, but already it seems to me like another age; as though I had dwelt in another world."

As he finished speaking he led the way by another door back to the room which Daniel had just quitted. Now his eyes caught sight of something half-buried in a pile of refuse in one corner, and, with a little exclamation, he bent and drew it forth.

"Look," he cried. "It is little Marie's *poupée*. What a treasure! I must keep it carefully and take it to her some day. Surely she will remember it, for a little mother never forgets her baby."

There was a burning mist in Daniel's eyes for an instant, as they made out the misshaped remains of what had once been a baby's cherished rag doll. More poignantly than had any of the other sights, it brought straight home to him the vision of the broken fireside, the scattered family. The same thought was in his mind as had been in Jean's — that of a little mother forced to flee, as hundreds had been, leaving behind her dearest possession, her child.

The afternoon was already far spent. The shadows of advancing evening were stealing into the house to lend added gloom and grimness to the picture of desolation. The spirit of the place laid its specter hand on Daniel's heart, as he compared it to the peaceful scene in the living-room at home, so

many miles away, and he was nothing loath to follow Jean's suggestion that they depart before the darkness made movement dangerous.

"Soon there will be much celebration in the streets, for it is better to forget the days that are gone, and to think only of the new day which is now being ushered in with song and rejoicing. Hark!"

Both paused to listen, standing in the darkened doorway, for night had already entrenched itself in the steep, close-walled street. High on the hill above them sounded the triumphant pealing of clear, melodious bells, chanting the song of deliverance.

"Come quickly, Monsieur. Listen, they are ringing the Cathedral chimes. It is the first time in three long years. Hasten, hasten! You, too, must pull on one of the ropes so that you can tell your children and grandchildren, in the days to come, that you helped ring the bells of Immortal Verdun, on the night of its liberation."

Clang, clang, clang! Through the still evening air swelled the vibrant message of the chimes, which, for a hundred years, had been famed for the clarity and sweetness of their tone.

The pair sped up the narrow, cobbled way to the *Place de la Cathedral*, and found it already filled with moving, shouting forms. Together they forced a passage through the crowd around the

doorway in the base of the left-hand tower, and slowly made their way up the stairway of thick oaken planks which wound up through the darkness to one of two square chambers, joined by a passage. The gleam from several flaring *briquets* — the French soldier's inevitable cigarette lighter — produced a fantastic illumination, by which Daniel made out the figures of a dozen uniformed men, swaying back and forth as they tugged at the four or five ropes which dangled out of the blackness above. With the eagerness of youth they elbowed others from their path, and together seized one of the rope-ends. A long, bending pull, and the big bell above them sounded forth its deep-voiced note. Again. Again. The perspiration began to start from Daniel's warmly clad body, but he pulled on and on, in a sort of ecstasy, for he felt that it had been granted to him to participate in a unique ceremony — the birth of a new epoch for a city whose name History had written oft in letters of untarnishable gold.

Weary at last, they yielded the rope to other eager hands, and Jean led the way up the remainder of the two hundred steep steps to the open space atop the square tower.

The chill night air smote Daniel's heated body, but he forgot to feel cold as his gaze swept the dis-

tant skyline formed by billowing hills. It was almost fully dark, but each stood out against the sky as though silhouetted in fire. Jean anticipated the question which was on his tongue. "Look!" he exclaimed. "They are firing off the now useless flares and rockets, with which we used to illumine the night in order better to watch the foe. Ah, *Dieu,* but it is beautiful . . . *now!* There are no guns sounding to-night, Monsieur, but can you not imagine yourself a sentinel here during the long watches of the night, or in the daytime, when the shells are bursting over the town and all about you, as you gaze at those distant hills? For years *poilus* have stood as we now stand, helpless targets for some well-directed shell which never came, although how close some of them fell, you can observe, Monsieur."

He pointed downward, and Daniel leaned over the stone balustrade to peer into the black interior of the Cathedral whose roof had been torn away. The American shuddered.

The song of the chimes at length died into the stillness, and a clear tenor voice behind them suddenly began a song that thrilled him to his depths, so martial, so triumphant were both the words and the melody:

"Et Verdun, la victorieuse,
Pousse un cri qui portent là bas

Les échos des bords de la Meuse,
Halte là! On ne passe pas!
Plus de morgue, plus d'arrogance,
Fuyez barbares et laquais,
C'est ici la Porte de France
Et vous ne passerez . . . jamais!" [1]

There was a short burst of applause, but Daniel's attention was immediately attracted to Jean, who was looking down into the square beneath. "See, there is my lieutenant; I could recognize his figure anywhere." He pointed to an automobile whose occupants were thrown into clear relief by the headlights on a car behind them. "Doubtless they are waiting for you. Shall we not descend, Monsieur?"

* * * * * * * *

With a regretful last glance at the never-to-be-forgotten picture painted on the blue-black sky, Daniel nodded his assent, and turned to follow his guide.

[1] And Verdun, victorious,
Starts the river echoes clear
With her watchword glorious,
"'Halt! Ye shall not pass.' For here
Ends barbaric arrogance.
Fails your boast — like sounding brass —
This is the portal of our France
And ye shall never, never pass!"

"Verdun, On ne passe pas."
Free metrical translation by the Author.

And all through the long, tiresome drive homeward it lingered in his memory. As Jean had prophesied, he had truly experienced something of which he could proudly tell his children in future years. With the thought, his heart went out anew to Faith, so sweet, so constant, waiting for him in the quiet harbor that he called home.

CHAPTER IX

THE ROAD TO MIRABELLE

The days added themselves into weeks, the weeks slipped swiftly by, bringing Christmas and a New Year in their train.

Winter lay over the land — not the clear, crispy season that Daniel had known and loved at home, but one of shivering damps and frequent thaws, when the moisture-laden earth became a clinging mud, ankle-deep in the unkempt streets of the ruined villages into which his daily labors took him. The precepts of his people had set a bridle on his tongue, but he was at times shocked at the profanity within his heart over the elements. The truth is that the blasphemy of the soldiers, with whom he had been so long and so closely in contact, had rubbed the edge off his conscience, in this respect, and words, at the expression of which he had once shrunk inwardly, now passed wholly unheeded.

Almost invariably cold, wet always, and physi-

cally miserable when he paused in his absorbing duties long enough to consider himself, he was, nevertheless, strangely content, for the fires of enthusiasm for his work burned high within him, and kept his spirit warm.

In the newly liberated area, of which Verdun was the center, the French government had assigned thirty destroyed villages to the American Society of Friends to rehabilitate, and several of them were within the radius apportioned to Daniel for investigation. He had to determine their former population, their condition for habitation; he had to plan for the establishment of one huge *centre de reception* where the returning refugees could be housed temporarily, and for the future erection of concrete huts and neat little portable homes, which should later be rented to them for nominal sums, or sold at practically cost, and on easy terms. And there were canteens to be arranged for, wherein the weary wayfarers, often sick at heart from viewing the desolated spots which had once been their homes, might find rest and comfort for body and soul. And shell-filled fields to be examined to find out how much — if any — agriculture could take place on them that spring, and how many implements would be required. And . . . oh, there was a multitude of kindred tasks, such as the pioneer is always called

upon to perform, and although, for the time being, he missed the satisfaction which comes from personal contact with those one serves, the work brought its own reward.

The contentment which filled him was made deeper by the subconsciousness that, after the season of labor, there awaited him a sure reward at home, for Faith's weekly letters gave him bright glimpses of the haven where he would be. They were always sweet and simple, like herself, but in every line Daniel read the story of a love which daily grew more deep. The realization was wonderful to him, yet not quite real — like one of his old-time imagined romances — for it was difficult for him to visualize the flesh and blood Faith in the role of sweetheart, having known her so long as a sister. And he had yet to learn the great truth, that when real love enters the heart of a pure woman it straightway weaves itself into every fiber of her being; body, mind and soul becoming one with it.

Not that his own affection had waned, but a man — who is more essentially a physical being — generally requires a tangible object to arouse his love to its fullest. An ideal and a memory are seldom enough.

In the full absorption which his labors produced, Daniel almost ceased to think of the girl,

Joan, whom he was promise-bound to seek, but at times the recollection came unbidden, to prick his conscience on the most unexpected occasions. And one night the sight of her mutilated picture, which he had drawn from his pocket by mistake for Faith's, made him suddenly determine to clear his mind of the whole matter by sending it to her with a brief explanatory note, since he had begun to despair of his ever being able to go to Mirabelle. He spent nearly an hour with dictionary and phrase book, in an endeavor to couch his message in expressive French, but when he re-read the finished note he tore it up as hopelessly crude, and vowed that he had been a fool for having allowed the romantic impulse of a moment to rule his better judgement.

Then the three women who weave human destinies busied themselves again with the pattern of his life.

Daniel received orders to move on to the other half of the ruined area, to the south of his present field of operations, and the letter carried the suggestion that he might possibly locate his headquarters in some still habitable village, in, or close by the devastated section, when he could travel by train, bicycle or foot, as the occasion demanded. He turned to his map of that section, and started to

draw a red ink outline around the villages named in his orders. Suddenly the moving pen stopped as though of its own accord. The line had reached a small black dot, against which, in diminutive letters, was the word "Mirabelle."

Perhaps the Fates were chuckling!

* * * * * * * *

Running true to form, if not to schedule, the train panted into the junction station, several hours late. The early armistice period had produced little, if any, improvement on the debilitated railroads of Northeastern France, and as the movement of freight was vastly more important than that of passengers, the two were frequently carried in combination — in which cases the hare naturally took the tortoise's pace. Thus it was with the train on which Daniel journeyed southeastward. It was made up of equal numbers of flat cars, piled with cord-wood, and dirty, third-class coaches — some of them still bearing German signs — crowded with *poilus,* and stuffy with the bitter smoke of many strong French cigarettes.

One other American was in his coach, a corporal whose left shoulder bore the Lorraine Cross and "A.S." — advance sector — and his sleeve three gold chevrons. "Can you beat it?" he demanded, plaintively, for the tenth time, as the train slowed

down to the speed of a moderate walk. "These frogs have about as much 'pep' as a bowl of cambric tea. I'd get out and push, if I wasn't afraid of shoving their dinky engine off the track."

Daniel laughed. "Where are you headed?" he asked.

"Back to the mudhole that the frogs call Neufchateau, to act as valet to a bunch of ornery army mules. G—d, how I hate it."

"Then what are you in such a hurry to get back there for?"

"Me? In a hurry to get back? How do yer get that way?"

"But you were just complaining about the speed of this train, buddy."

"Aw, well; let's go *somewhere*, I say, and these frogs are the plumb slowest, laziest race on the face of the earth. Look at this here train now."

"Well, I'm not crazy about it, myself," confessed Daniel. "But we might as well be honest and admit that France has been, and is still, 'up against it.' She hasn't had, for four years, either time or money to keep her rails and rolling stock in repair; more than half the time she is obliged to use wood instead of coal on these branch lines, and when you are living a hand to mouth existence you cannot always eat on schedule. Of course we like to think that

in the good old U. S. A. we do everything a little better than it is done anywhere else in the world, but have you ever noticed how smoothly these French trains start and stop — even mixed affairs like this one — and compared it with the bumps and jolts which we get at home? I see that you have been over here more than eighteen months, so perhaps it will be difficult for you to believe me, when I tell you that, since our government took over the railways, things haven't been such an awful lot better in America than they are here — with the war more than three thousand miles away, instead of right on the premises."

The Yank turned on him a look of unbelieving disgust that made Daniel smile, but instead of commenting on the statement, which he obviously considered absurd, the soldier remarked, "And we had to come them three thousand miles to win the war. The Frenchies couldn't do it."

"Look here, buddy," answered Daniel, no longer amused. "I like to believe that America was God's instrument in ending the war, as well as you do. But as a sporting nation, and — I hope — a nation of good sports, we ought to be both just and generous. We came in with a hand-picked bunch of trained athletes capable of putting over the knock-out blow, but it isn't fair to forget that France, with

an army made up of soldiers ranging from mere boys to men past middle age, had been wearing down the enemy for four years, and, groggy from the loss of her best blood, was still hanging on." In his earnestness he was surprised to find himself using expressions which had never passed his lips before, and he suddenly smiled as he mentally pictured the look on the Elder's calm face if he could have heard him then. "I'm not a military man, and I don't pretend to know much about fighting," he continued, "but I've heard American officers say that, although the French troops don't look like much, and perhaps have not the dash of our boys — which is not strange — they are the stubbornest fighters on earth and the best marchers."

"Ah, h—ll — begging your pardon," said the Yank. "Well, maybe you're right, friend, but nearly two years of this sort of thing — blood, mud, cooties, a queer foreign lingo . . . and —— —— mules, certainly gets a fellow's goat. I suppose that after I've got one good look at the Goddess of Liberty, God bless her, I'll be telling my friends that France is *there,* all ways from the center. Well, we're here at last. Glad to have met yer."

A spur line ran up the bank of the Moselle on the opposite side of the river from Mirabelle, but, long before their arrival at the junction, Daniel's watch

had told him that the one afternoon train thither had departed, and when he disembarked he found himself faced with the dismal alternative of getting a room in the crowded, uninviting town — if, indeed, it were possible to do so — or plodding the seven kilometres which lay between him and his avowed destination, with even less certainty of obtaining accommodations for the night upon his arrival in that hamlet of six hundred souls.

Nevertheless, a streak of Quaker stubbornness made him take to the road that wound with the Moselle into the open country, northward.

The day had been mild, and, as he left the paved street for the highway, the mud underfoot began to make walking both unpleasant and difficult; but the first gray tones of the long twilight brought a sudden change in the weather. The air grew rapidly more chill, and the rising wind came laden with the damps of the river valley. Snow began to fall, at first in vagrant flakes that were softly caressing, but which soon grew larger, wet, and adhesive. The blended dull greens and browns of the fields, on either side of the highway, slowly faded into white, but for a time the road itself remained, a dark, bisecting line. Then it, too, yielded, and the only color in all the landscape was furnished by the black of bare tree trunks, the cold gray of the rushing river, and the

vanishing line of brown footprints left behind by the traveler. The wind increased, raw and piercing.

Thoroughly wet at last, and with his spirits at low ebb, Daniel buried his square chin in the upturned collar of his heavy jacket, and drove on into the face of the storm, still stubborn, but inwardly anathematizing his stubbornness.

The cheery squares of yellow light which marked the windows of two intermediate hamlets, beckoned him from before, and then faded into the fast closing darkness behind. His muscular legs grew weary from the continued effort of pulling his weighted feet from the freezing mud. An hour later he had trudged over the last of three rolling hills, and below him appeared the blurred outlines of the little village which he sought. Save for its scattered window lights, it was almost indistinguishable in the gray-white dusk, for its jumbled roofs had changed from terra-cotta to white, and its uniformly gray walls faded into the sky with scarcely a suggestion of demarcation. Still, his goal now lay before him, and he consciously quickened his steps, while the rhythm of his heart-beats responded, subconsciously.

He entered the silent town, through which an army might to-night have marched without a footfall being audible. Not a person was in sight, but, from a long cement barrack upon a slight elevation

beside the roadway, there came the muffled sound of voices and laughter, and the clink of tin on tin. It announced the hour of the soldiers' "soup," and Daniel suddenly realized that his own anatomy yearned for food. Somewhere in the distance ahead a dog barked his entreaty to be allowed to go indoors out of the snow and cold, and the man experienced a strong desire to sit down, and howl in sympathy. His imagination pictured the thought, and it struck him as so ludicrous that he laughed, and stepped out again in better humor, mentally calling out "good appetite" to the unseen diners.

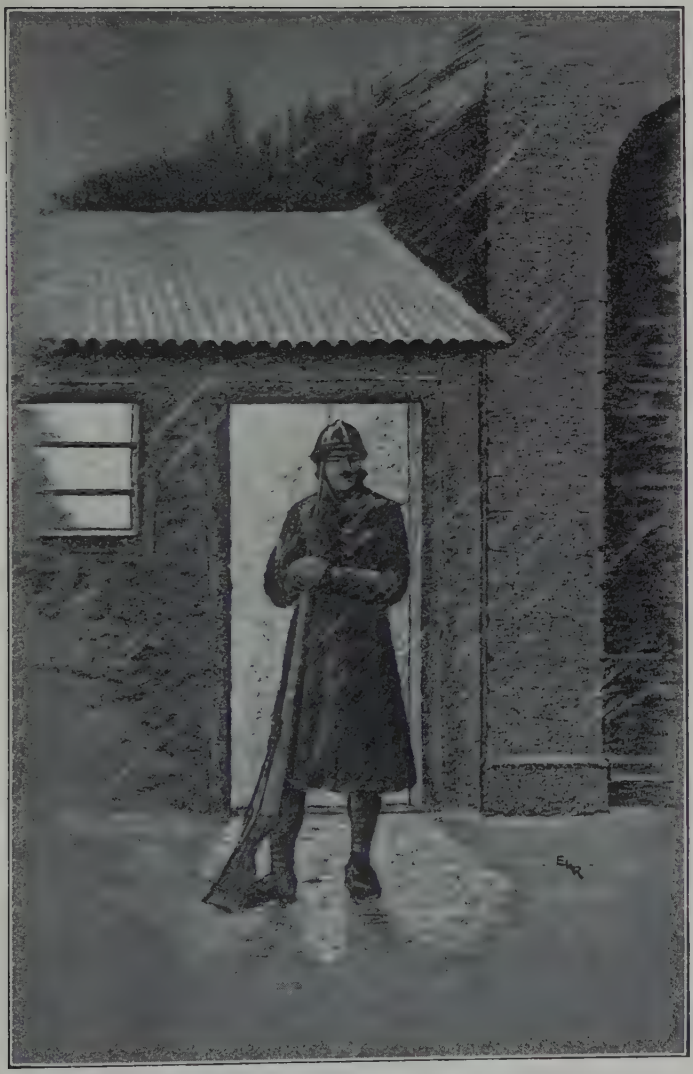
CHAPTER X

THE PROPHECY OF OLD BARBETTE

INDEED Daniel had traversed nearly the full length of the village's main street, and was drawing near to the severely plain church which raised one square tower dimly into the gray darkness above, before he saw a person.

A cheerful glow spilled out from the open door of a small, shed-like affair, built in an angle of the church, close beside the high arched entrance, and, silhouetted against the panel of light, a motionless sentry was standing his lonely vigil. Another and smaller illuminated square — a window — was trisected by two thin bars of black. "Why, it's a guard house!" thought Daniel. "What a strange place to put it — what an anomaly. But, after all, it is rather symbolic, the everlasting arms stretched out around those in prison and affliction."

With a feeling of relief, he obliquely approached the sentry, and addressed him. "Pardon, Monsieur, but can you perhaps tell me where I may find a lodging for the night?"



"A MOTIONLESS SENTRY WAS STANDING HIS LONELY VIGIL"

The *poilu* shook the snow from his shoulders, and answered, "A lodging? I regret, but I do not know, Monsieur. The village is full of troops, and I am afraid that every spare room has been requisitioned for the use of our officers. *Que voulez-vous?* The 'class' must have the best there is, you know. However, it will do no harm for you to inquire at the corner house, there; the billeting officer may, perhaps, know of a place. If not, there is a larger village on the other side of the river, where possibly . . . " He finished with another expressive shrug of his shoulders.

Daniel's heart sank; his weariness flowed back, redoubled. He knew that this was no more than he might reasonably have expected, for experience should have taught him that it was the everyday lot of most villages in that area to be overcrowded, but this did not prevent him from feeling rebellious disappointment.

It had not been his intention, on so dismal a night, to visit the le Jeune family, with the message which could not but re-open old heart-wounds, but now he determined to do so, and thus accomplish his primary purpose in visiting Mirabelle. He would fulfil his promise, and then dismiss the whole matter from his mind.

"Yes," he replied. "I'll follow your suggestion,

but first I have an errand to perform here. I want to find the home of the le Jeune family. Do you happen to know where they live?"

"I regret, Monsieur, but again I cannot help you. My battalion has but recently come to this village, and I am not acquainted with any of the civilians, as yet. Perhaps if there are some pretty daughters in the le Jeune household, and Monsieur will come back a week hence and ask me that question . . . " He laughed so frankly that Daniel could not help joining him.

"But look! There is someone who may be able to tell you." The soldier pointed through the gloom, and Daniel made out a queer, distorted figure of an old woman, who was toiling painfully along, with her misshapen back still further bent beneath the weight of a load of snow-covered branches. "She is an old hag — a sort of gypsy — who lives around the corner, and on pleasant days sells little trinkets from a push cart, and tells fortunes for the *poilus*."

"Thank you, Monsieur." Saluting, Daniel hastened towards the retreating figure, which had now, panting audibly, paused to re-adjust the heavy burden.

As the American approached he saw a strange and pitiful picture, for the light from a window of the little shop where Joan did her purchasing, fil-

tered wanly through the sheeting snow, and illuminated the old woman. He took only passing note of her shapeless garments, which were scarcely more than an assortment of rags, so patched were they, or of her feet, although a glimpse of her bare ankles which showed above the wooden shoes, made him shiver. It was rather her unusual face which gripped his imaginative mind, for it looked as old as the ages, yet, underneath the scanty white eyebrows, burned two eyes like living coals. Stringy locks of iron-gray hair, wet with melting snow, escaped from beneath the frayed black shawl around her head, and were plastered to a wrinkled countenance, the color and texture of tanned leather.

" Permit me, mother." Without waiting for her to get over her surprise, and make reply, he seized the clumsy bundle of uneven fagots, and shifted it from her deformed back to his own broad shoulder. " They are heavy, I will carry them for you."

He started forward, and, as his new companion hobbled along by his side, she began to speak in a voice so cracked and unsteady, and so blurred with a southern accent unfamiliar to Daniel's ears, as to be almost unintelligible. Nevertheless, he managed to make out the words, " Thank you heartily, young and kind Monsieur. You are very considerate." And then, " It is a villainous night, is it not? "

"Yes, terrible, and it is rapidly growing much colder. You will have need of the firewood this evening."

"It is true. The hot blood of youth courses swiftly in young veins, like yours, but in mine it is slow, slow. I suffer much, but it is the will of the good God that I should live on and on, so I do not complain." Her words became a muttered jumble, and she rubbed her bony fingers, stiff and blue with the cold, until their joints cracked.

"You live far from here, mother?"

"But no; not far, not far. My home is just around the corner. Yes, just around the corner is rest . . . it is always so, is it not, Monsieur?"

Not quite certain whether he was listening to the ravings of a cracked brain, or the wisdom of a venerable philosopher, Daniel contented himself with nodding.

"He speaks the French well, yes, very well, but he is nevertheless a foreigner, the young Monsieur," she continued, as though talking to herself. "And he is not an Englishman . . . ah, I know, I know them all. I see a far distant land across broad stretches of blue water, which he will recross not many moons from now. He will be happy at last, there by his own fireside, but first there is to be much unhappiness for him; yes, much unhappiness,

He loves our France, he wishes her well, but she will repay his kindness with sorrow and suffering, for I see a shadow before him, a heavy shadow which lies across his path. Ah, it is too bad, too bad, for he is kind of heart, the young Monsieur."

Daniel very nearly stopped from shocked surprise, as his brain caught the significance of her mumblings. He felt that it was childish of him, but the dreary setting and the hag's unpleasant predictions gripped his heart like a cold hand, for an instant. "Of course the poor old thing is utterly mad," he decided, but he could not help remembering that the sentinel had declared her to be a fortune-teller. Certainly the experience was proving anything but agreeable.

As though she had actually read his thoughts, the old woman uttered a mirthless cackle, and cried, "*Oh, la, la,* the heart of the young Monsieur is disturbed; perhaps he thinks that poor old Barbette is a witch, because she says that evil lies in the pathway before him — as though evil were not the lot of all mortal men; and because she has declared that he is kind of heart, which any fool could tell, since he helps a poor old woman with her burdens. But perhaps old Barbette may be able to repay his kindness some day; yes, perhaps some day she can help *him.* Who knows?"

Then, abruptly, she turned and addressed Daniel direct.

"You are dressed in uniform, like a soldier, but you are not a soldier, Monsieur; I see no blood on your hands. Do I not speak the truth, young Monsieur?"

"Yes, you are quite right," Daniel agreed, uncomfortably. "I belong to the American Society of Friends, which tries to relieve, and not to cause suffering in the world."

"Ah, that is good, good. Although it seems sometimes necessary to cause pain in order, in the end, to cure it. Still, I think that too much blood has been shed of late, for nowadays I see it everywhere — on the hands and in the hearts of men. Take care that you do not dip your hands in it, also, Monsieur."

Daniel forced a laugh to cover his uneasiness. "There is little danger of that, Madame. I am not a soldier, you know; and, besides, the fighting is over."

"'The fighting is over,' says he!" she derided. "The war may be ended, yes, but while men are men, and kin to the beasts, fighting will never cease. Old Barbette has said it, and she knows. Don't forget, too, that she has warned you."

They turned the corner full into the face of the

storm, which swept, shrieking, down the hillside road, but close against a high wall, and in its deep shadow, Daniel made out the blurred shape of a tiny, one-room cabin, perched on wheels. A light shone through a small square window, and it seemed to him as though he caught a glimpse of an elfish face, drawn, and as white as the world outside, pressed for an instant against the snow-streaked glass. The old woman veered toward it, panting and muttering.

"It is here, then, that you dwell, mother?"

"But yes. Is it not magnificent?" She spoke with a derisive cackle. "Still, it is cosy, and plenty big enough for old Barbette, even though once she . . . But why think of the days that are gone? A roof to shelter one from the storm, a little fire to warm one, and a place to lay the weary head is more than had the Son of Man; and what more needs man, who is kin to the beasts?"

He helped her up the slippery steps to the little place which served both as driver's platform and front porch, and not until she had her clawlike hand on the latch of the door, did he remember his primary reason for joining her. Raising his voice above the gibberish of the winds, he called, "There is something that I forgot to ask you, Madame. I

am seeking the home of the le Jeune family. Can you, perhaps, direct me to it?"

"The le Jeunes, then? Yes, certainly. If the moon were shining, and directly behind you, you would have but to follow your shadow to the top of the hill and enter the last house on the left in order to find them. Aye, aye, merely to follow your shadow," she repeated, wagging her head, and Daniel found himself wondering if there were any hidden meaning in her peculiar manner of giving the directions. Was she still referring to himself, or *could* she read his thoughts, and foresee that he was bringing a shadow out of the valley of death to the le Jeune family?

"Thank you, mother. I am not rich like so many Americans, but if you will accept a trifle — perhaps as compensation for the fortune which you have told me — I shall be happy." He reached up, and slipped a franc piece into her hand.

"A thousand thanks, Monsieur. Old Barbette was not mistaken when she said that you were kind of heart, and she will not forget; no, she will not forget. Good-night, and may the good God attend you always."

"Thank you. Good-night, mother."

A stumbling walk, all too brief in which to decide just what he meant to say on his arrival, and how

best to say it, brought him opposite the last house on the hillside — a two-storied, cement cottage somewhat smaller than its neighbors, which, perhaps, accounted for the fact that its front wall bore no wooden sign announcing that it served as military quarters for so many men, and so many horses. A dark smudge at the right hand indicated the presence of an entrance, and a dull glow of curtained light in a lower window told the story of a family circle within. Daniel turned up the short path, hesitated, stamped his wet feet on the silencing snow to start a little circulation in them, and then strode determinedly forward into the pitch black entryway, to meet the uncertain welcome that awaited him. A pencil line of light at one side showed the location of a door, and he knocked.

There was the sound of a scraping chair, the shuffle of woolen-slippered feet from within. Then the door opened part way, and he saw the bent shoulders, and kindly, wrinkled face of a seemingly old man, who peered inquiringly at him through the small lenses of a pair of rusty steel-rimmed spectacles.

"Good-evening. Monsieur seeks . . . ?"

"I beg your pardon for troubling you on such a night, but I am looking for the house of Monsieur le Jeune. Is this . . . ?"

"But yes. I am he. You wish to see . . . ?"

Daniel hesitated, then said, as gently as possible, "You are then the father of . . . of Henri le Jeune, late of the French artillery?"

"Henri! *Oh, mon dieu, mon dieu!*" came from within the room in a woman's voice.

"Hush, my mother. Hush then, dear. Father, ask Monsieur to enter. Perhaps he has some word . . . some message . . . "

The man shuffled backwards, his seamed hands clasped and working, and Daniel followed him into the little room, with a word of apology for the snow which fell from his coated garments to melt on the tiled floor. Feeble as was the illumination from the single unshaded lamp, his eyes, adjusted to the darkness, could not, for an instant, make out the details of the picture before him. All that he knew was that five mistily white faces had turned startled, wondering eyes upon him.

Then, as the scene cleared to his vision, all save one faded from his notice. For directly in front of him, with the shadow of a hidden pain making more than ever appealing her sweet, sensitive face, was the girl of the picture card — Joan.

CHAPTER XI

THE HEART OF A HOME

Standing, Daniel very simply told the story of his brief acquaintance with the boy who had died, delivered his message, and placed the picture in Joan's outstretched hands. She gave it one glance, a slight shudder passed through her and her lips trembled for the briefest instant, but no tears came to her large and luminous eyes as she bent her head, and pressed the card close against her breast.

His words had been addressed to them all, but it was as though he spoke to the girl alone, and it was she, only, of whom he was conscious when he had finished. He realized, but only in a vague way, that her mother and apparently younger sister were sobbing freely, and that Monsieur le Jeune was unsteadily pressing a large colored handkerchief to his bearded lips. There was an aged woman present, also, but she had not moved since his entrance, and still sat gazing stolidly before her.

And it was Joan who spoke first, saying in a low,

liquid voice, "Thank you, Monsieur, you have been most kind to bring to us the message, which we shall always cherish in our hearts. We knew that my dear brother surely died like a true Frenchman, but it is good to hear it also, and from the lips of one who knew him." Then, for the first time, the even flow of her musical voice broke, she turned abruptly away with her hands covering her pale face, and Daniel heard the barely whispered words, "Oh, *God,* why could it not have been I instead?" Instantly the younger girl was by her side with arms about her shoulders, and the light hair mingled with the dark as she pressed her lips to Joan's neck.

Ill at ease, the American ventured the words, "He was a wonderfully fine lad, Monsieur. Although I really talked with him only that once, I somehow felt when I saw him again . . . there at the hospital . . . as though I had found a friend. He was so boyish, and so brave, that I know I shall never forget him. Was he . . . was his body . . . brought home?"

"Yes, Monsieur, we have that small comfort," answered Joan, as she faced him, dry-eyed once more. "He lies over yonder in the little graveyard where we can see the cross above him, and every day be reminded of his sacrifice. And so we thank the dear Lord, for he does not lie in an unmarked grave

on the battlefield. Perhaps it is foolish, but somehow his spirit seems to be . . . at home, again."

"It would have been with you in any event, I am sure, for he thought of you always, his friend Jean said. But I think that I understand, Mademoiselle."

"And the young soldier . . . Jean? Is he . . . was he much wounded? You see we know him also, Monsieur."

There was a sweet note of entreaty in the girl's voice, a perfectly natural one, but Daniel experienced a slight sense of inexplicable irritation, and was angry at himself for so doing. "No," he replied. "His arm was torn by fragments of the same shell, but it has now healed." And he described their later meeting in Verdun, ending by inquiring, "It is here that his little sisters and brother live, is it not?"

"But yes, almost across the street. Ah, the little Pierre. Monsieur would both laugh and cry over him, he is so pathetic, and so sweet."

"I'm sure that I should like to see them all, for I love children passionately," Daniel rejoined, as he picked up his cap and took a step backward.

The others stood up, except the old grandmother, and Monsieur le Jeune moved slowly with hand held out, and trembling. "We desire to thank you, my wife and I, for your visit will mean much to us

in the days that are before, Monsieur . . . I do not yet know your name," he said.

"It is Steele — Daniel Steele, Monsieur."

"Ah, yes. Monsieur Steele. I hope that some day we may be able to repay your kindness to us; and now will you permit me to offer you a little *liqueur,* perhaps a glass of the Mirabelle made from my own trees? You are wet, and surely cold, also."

"Thank you, but I do not drink . . . except, possibly, a glass of water, for I *am* somewhat thirsty."

"And perhaps hungry, as well, Monsieur? You have not dined?" It was Joan's voice that broke in, with solicitude. "You must pardon us for having been so forgetful of common hospitality, but your message . . . Are you staying in our village, Monsieur? I think not, for I have never seen you before, and every one in Mirabelle knows when there is a stranger here — except the soldiers, of course. Is it then possible that, on such a frightful night, you have come from some other place simply to tell us about . . . about Henri?"

"To tell the truth, I have just arrived in Mirabelle, coming from X . . . but not entirely for the reason you have suggested. I had hoped to find a place to stay, here, since my work is to be in the

near-by ruined area, but I am told that there is little chance of it — the village is filled with troops, is it not?"

Instead of answering his question, Joan exclaimed, "Monsieur! You have just arrived, and the train reached B . . . across the river, hours ago. Then you must have walked all the way, and we would have permitted you to go away — out into the storm again — like this. Oh, I am humiliated. And you *have* eaten nothing, is it not so? Mother, dost thou understand? The kind American has eaten nothing. Quick, Suzette, put on the kettle. No, you must stay, we insist, Monsieur. It will be but a moment before we have something prepared, which will be at least hot and nourishing, even if the fare is simple." In her eagerness, Joan had placed her hands against Daniel's shoulders, endeavoring to push him into a chair, and the contact gave him a thrill of pleasure. He protested, but the pangs of a very real hunger made his protests faint, and, besides, they were lost in the bustle of preparation.

Thus it resulted, that a few moments later he found himself seated at the plain wooden table before a steaming bowl of savory stew, part of a loaf of French bread, a saucer of Mirabelle *confiture,* and a thick cup of piping hot, black coffee which mother

le Jeune had insisted upon sweetening to a degree far beyond what was palatable to him. His courtesy remonstrances had gone for nothing and he could not press them, for he had recognized in her act the true spirit of sacrifice, which had brought to his Biblically trained mind the story of the woman of Bethany with her box of precious ointment.

Across the table from him, with their chairs drawn close within the radius of the single light, the four women were already re-engaged in their work — the old grandmother bent low over one of her son's coarse socks which she was darning, and the others over their dainty needlework. After the scenes of desolation, in the midst of which his life had lately been set, the simple picture of domesticity warmed and soothed the watcher's heart. Daniel in the main kept his eyes bent on his plate, from which the food was rapidly vanishing before the onslaught of a healthy appetite, but he seldom glanced up without encountering the gaze of the younger girl, fixed upon him with the frank curiosity of a child. For a time the father puttered about the room, doing little unnecessary things, but he finally seated himself beside their visitor and began to converse.

" You will pardon me, Monsieur, but I think that I do not quite understand what you are. Is it that

you belong to the Red Cross, for you speak of working in the destroyed villages?"

"I belong to an organization affiliated with the Red Cross, Monsieur — the American Society of Friends — have you ever heard of it?"

"But yes, and of you, Monsieur," responded his wife. "Surely, Auguste, you remember the last letter from our Henri, in which he described the meeting with Monsieur at the *Foyer du Soldat.*"

"To be sure. It was then he, of whom Joan said . . ."

"Father!" cried the girl. "Monsieur, I owe you an apology, for I must admit that then I did not understand, and I thought that I would not like one who would not fight against the *Boche.*" She blushed hotly.

"I understand, and I do not blame you, having seen what I have since reaching this area. Our faith forbids us to bear arms, and fight in battle against other men, but there is another kind of fighting — that against sorrow and suffering. It is to engage in that, that we have come to France, and to do our little best to help the homeless and fatherless, as all men are commanded to do."

"Yes, now I understand better," said her father. "It is a noble work, truly, and one which our poor France stands sadly in need of, now. Verily the

Americans have saved us, and we owe you all, more than we can ever repay. Would you be willing to tell us something about the work which you have been doing?"

Daniel cheerfully supplied a brief outline of the labors of his organization in the two regions around Verdun and Chateau Thierry, and then, carried along by his own enthusiasm, recounted a number of the interesting and pathetic incidents which he had witnessed, helped out by Joan, who seemed often to divine the thought in his mind, and supply the elusive word, when he became lost in the intricacies of the foreign language.

"So now you are to carry on the same sort of work here between the Moselle and the Meuse, is it not so?"

"Yes."

"And that is why you had hoped to find some place to stay here in Mirabelle, because it is so near the scene of your task?"

"Just so. But I might have guessed that all the villages in this neighborhood would be harboring troops."

"Hmmm." Daniel caught a glance and a nod pass between the man and his wife, and tried to appear unconscious of the whispered conversation which ensued between her and Joan. But his heart

thumped in anticipation, nevertheless, and he was prepared to hear the former say, earnestly, "If Monsieur thinks that he would care to remain in our little house, at least until he finds some place which might suit him better, it would be our pleasure."

"Truly you are very kind to suggest it, Madame, but I could not think of disarranging your household. You see, I feel certain that you have not a spare room."

"But we have, we have, Monsieur," Suzette burst out. "There is Joan's room, and she can sleep with me as she did last summer when the other American — the captain — was here."

"Suzette, why didst thou say, in *my* room?" Joan chided, reproachfully. "You must not misunderstand, Monsieur. We often sleep together, Suzette and I, even when we have no guest, for she is a very naughty child, and needs some one to watch over her always."

"So I am naughty, then, Joan? Very well, when we go to bed to-night I shall pinch thee, so that thou wilt not be disappointed," the child-woman answered mischievously.

"Hush, perverse one. I, too, can pinch." There was a little laughter which put a smile in Daniel's own heart, and he thought, "How different Joan looks when she smiles; not prettier, perhaps, which

is scarcely possible, but more bewitchingly fascinating." And for the first time he realized that the younger girl was also unusually attractive, although still in the bud.

"So it is all arranged, my mother. The American Monsieur shall not go out into the storm to-night, and he shall stay here as long as he likes — for he was a friend of our Henri, and shall he not, therefore, be always a friend of ours as well?"

"But yes, always."

"I cannot thank you sufficiently, Monsieur and Madame; you are too generous, but I will gladly accept your hospitality for to-night, although of course I must depart to-morrow, because . . . "

"When to-morrow comes we shall see, but we hope that you will want to stay, for already we think of you as a friend."

"And perhaps he will also teach us the English," cried Suzette. "The American captain started to, and I know a few, and Joan many, words, for she studied diligently, although I think it was because she liked to sit beside him. But he went away and now, perhaps, he is dead, for he has written Joan only once." The girl jumped up, disregarding her sister's blushes and indignation, and opened a drawer in the cupboard from which she brought Daniel a picture postcard of the *Place Stanislaus,* in

Nancy, with a brief message written upon it in English. She leaned over his shoulder and, pointing to the signature, said, "His name was Captain John Smith. Did you know him in America, Monsieur? Joan pretends that she understands what he has written, but I am sure that she does not. Will you tell us, Monsieur?"

"About your captain? No, I'm afraid that I do not know him. You see America is a pretty large country — one of our forty-eight states is almost as big as France and Germany, combined. He merely says that he is going into battle immediately, and that he cannot thank Mlle. Joan, and all of you, enough for your many kindnesses to him. He will never forget you."

"There, wise one! Did I not say as much?" teased Joan.

"Ah, but thou merely guessed it. That is what any one would have said, and thou knewest that the Americans had finished their training, and were going into the fighting."

"How much English did *you* learn, little mademoiselle? Do you remember any of it?" queried Daniel.

"Yes, I remember a very little, but I cannot tell you now, for Joan is listening, as always." Daniel amusedly beckoned to her; she came close, and, with

her lips almost against his ear, whispered with quaint accent, " I loff you. Giff me a kees? "

The man was a little shocked, but he laughed, nevertheless, as he said, " My, but you were an apt pupil, certainly. How old are you, my child? "

" I? Oh, I shall be sixteen in a month, Monsieur, so I am no longer a child. And Joan is nearly four years older than I. Thou *art,* Joan, for when a girl has passed her nineteenth birthday she is almost twenty . . . especially if she is not already married. Is it not so, Monsieur? "

" But whom should a poor French girl marry, now? Are not most of the splendid young men of France dead? " demanded her sister.

" Jean Harent is not yet dead, and there are many Americans in France, who are not married. Are you, Monsieur? "

Joan blushed furiously again, and started from her seat, crying, " Naughty one, for that, thou shalt be pinched *now,*" but Daniel shielded the tormenter with his big form, and laughed frankly as he answered, " No, I am not yet married."

" Suzette," chided her mother, mildly, " it is not fitting for thee to speak thus of thy sister, and before a stranger."

" A stranger, my mother? But has he not himself said that he is a ' Friend? ' "

"I shall be glad to have you count me one, in fact as well as in name, if you will, even though you have known me but a short time." Daniel now spoke with an abrupt return to his natural seriousness, and Monsieur le Jeune answered with simple sincerity, "Thank you, Monsieur; one who has done what you have, for us, and for our poor boy, has earned a place in our heart of hearts. Please feel that this is hereafter your own fireside so long as you wish to regard it as such."

"I could ask for none better, and am more than fortunate."

"It is we who are fortunate. Suzette, go thou quickly and prepare Monsieur's bed, for he is surely tired."

The younger girl departed, and left silence in the room for a moment. His new host then offered Daniel a cigarette, and, when it was declined, asked permission to light one himself. Leaning back, he blew dreamy blue smoke rings ceilingward. The needles of the women flashed rapidly, the kettle sang on the tiny stove, and Mimite — who apparently had a penchant for men — purred lazily on Daniel's knees. A deep contentment filled the man.

Joan broke the stillness by asking, "You have a family in America, Monsieur?"

He started from his reverie. "Yes. At least I

have a kind step-father and mother, with whom, and their daughter, I live." As he replied, he drew the picture of Faith from his pocket, and passed it to her.

"Ah, she is very lovely, his little step-sister. Is she not, my mother?"

For a second time Daniel was startled to find himself hesitating to explain that Faith was much more to him than a sister. The words were on his lips, but something wholly inexplicable held them there, and again came the thought that it was rather a difficult explanation to make, and what necessity was there of making it at all? He suffered a twinge of conscience and was angry at that, as well. It was all over in a flash, and Opportunity had fled as swiftly, for Suzette stormed through the door, with her light-hearted chatter going on as though it had not been interrupted at all. For a few moments longer they conversed on random subjects, and then the mother — who had previously slipped from the room unobserved — returned to announce that Monsieur's room was ready, if he wished to go to it.

Daniel gratefully assented, for he was thoroughly weary, and the warmth of the room had made him drowsy, as well. He bade his hospitable new friends good-night and pleasant repose, and, picking up his little suit case, followed Monsieur le Jeune into the

freezing hallway and up the narrow groaning stairs, guided by the flickering light of a candle. The room which they entered was also chilly, but a newly built wood fire, in the small porcelain stove, was crackling cheerfully, and the high, four-post bedstead with its billowy feather coverlid and crimson quilt, already turned down for him, beckoned invitingly. With a final "Sleep well," the old man closed the door behind him, and shuffled off down stairs.

Daniel sighed with weary satisfaction. Standing close to the little stove, that gave forth a comforting warmth to which he had long been foreign, he divested himself of his clothing, and climbed into woolen pajamas. Then he blew out the candle flame, flung wide open the French window, and fled before the driving assault of the storm-laden wind to the protection of the high bed, into whose yielding depths he plunged. Oh, the sensuous delight of a real bed and sheets, after weeks of a sagging army cot of canvas, or worse, and wrinkled blankets made Boy Scout fashion to counterfeit a sleeping-bag, and into which one had to insinuate oneself by degrees.

He was surprised to find that the sheets felt delightfully warm to his bare feet, and, as he luxuriously stretched at full length, they came into contact

with something hot and hard, whose smooth contour proclaimed a stone jug filled with boiling water.

"Blessings on the woman!" he murmured; then a new idea sprang to his mind. Hot water! The wherewithal to take a real bath, which was a rare luxury in that region, as he had long since learned. On the instant he was out of bed again, and had relighted the candle. Another, and the lameness was departing from his tired muscles under the soothing influence of the steaming liquid. The sensation was glorious, and he blessed Madame anew, as he crawled back into the enveloping feathers.

Truly Fortune had smiled on him that day, for he had gained more than physical comfort — he had found his way into the heart of a true French home. The realization brought devout gratitude. "It is more than I deserve," he thought, as he settled himself for sleep. But, despite his weariness and all, sleep was long in coming. His eyes stared into the darkness which in time became the velvet background for Faith's sweet face, and there grew within his heart the feeling that he had failed in his love for her. Conscience is always the hardest taskmaster, and it whispered accusingly that he had already denied her twice — the second time not in words, perhaps, but by his silence which gave tacit assent to Joan's statement. Why? Why? He

could assign no reason for it, and began to toss and turn uncomfortably. And then his now wide-awake thoughts reverted to the girl whom he heard moving quietly about in the next room, and simultaneously Lieutenant Villier's laughing gibe reoccurred to his mind, "Wait until you meet some *real* French girl, perhaps some village lass with all the fascination of simplicity added to that which is inherent in every woman of our race." It was absurd; what could she mean to him? Yet he could not deny to himself that she had already exercised a strong appeal to his senses. Or had she? Was it not, rather, the environment, the peace and warmth of the family fireside after the toilsome journey through the storm and bitter night? Yes, that was it, certainly. To-morrow he would see her again in quite a different light, and besides, he could not think of further imposing upon his new friends, by prolonging his stay. Yet . . . how good the warm, comfortable bed felt!

And then his mind shifted again to the journey thither, to his meeting with "old Barbette," as she called herself, and to her unpleasantly prophetic mutterings. "A shadow, a deep shadow across his pathway ahead." What on earth could she have meant?

And so, he fell asleep.

CHAPTER XII

THE "MORROW"

MORNING. The storm was over; the sun shone brightly upon a new Mirabelle, spotless, white, and glistening — a village such as might have housed Santa Claus, so quaint and clean it looked to Daniel. On the roadway beneath his window, the snow creaked merrily under wooden shoon, and scintillated prismic colors. The air seemed fairly to sparkle, likewise, and so did Joan's eyes, as he entered the downstairs room in response to an early call to *petit déjeuner*[1] — a call that had almost caught him napping in the literal sense, for the soft warm bed had held him with a tempter's embrace.

Daniel would have honestly scoffed, had any one characterized him as an artist, and probably no one would have conceived of him in such a role, he was so big, so outwardly calm and practical, but — like

[1] The light breakfast of coffee with milk, and bread.

most imaginative people — he had a keen appreciation for the beautiful things, and the picture of the girl at the open window, with the golden morning light aureoling her dark hair, thrilled him anew with delight. The cold, which would have killed an earth flower, had paradoxically called two pink roses to life in her cheeks, and, indeed, all of the household, even to the aged and wrinkled grandam, were glowing in flesh and vibrant in spirit.

To his relief, no mention was made of the reason for his coming, nor was he surprised, for he now knew the French well enough to understand that they can hide black grief beneath bright smiles, as can no other race on earth. It was a characteristic which he had come to regard as Providential. Furthermore, during the desultory conversation which accompanied his solitary breakfast of *cafe au lait,* bread and jam, not a word was said about the possibility of his departing. Then, as he finished eating, he tried to drive himself to make the plunge into the unpleasant subject, with an idea of reiterating his previous night's statement that he could not think of further imposing upon their hospitality. But he was anticipated by Madame le Jeune, who remarked, "I am glad that Monsieur liked the room and slept well, for now he will stay with us."

Again, a faint protest for courtesy's sake was on

Daniel's lips, and again he was not permitted to utter it, for Suzette broke gaily in with the question, "But tell us, Monsieur, of whom did you dream last night? You know it is very important to remember the dreams which one has during the first night spent in a strange bed, for it means that . . . "

"Cease thy foolish prattle, Suzette," her mother called from the stove. "Monsieur Steele has more important things to think of, than dreams."

The girl's mischievously expectant look, still fixed on his face, forced him to answer, however. "Of whom did I dream, then? Why . . . " he laughed, to cover a sudden confusion, and felt that his face was growing red. "Why, I really don't remember."

But he did. And when, an instant later, he stole a sidewise glance at Joan, she, too, blushed unaccountably, and hurriedly lowered her eyes to her embroidery. Desirous of changing the embarrassing subject, he announced, "It is so pleasant this morning that I think I shall walk to the nearest of the ruined villages, and start my preliminary examination of my new territory."

"Good, if Monsieur desires," responded Madame. "But may I make a suggestion? It is that since every civilian in the village must have a card for his allotment of sugar, you visit the office of the Mayor and apply for yours, first of all. Joan shall ac-

company and assist you in doing the things which are necessary." .

"Certainly, I shall be pleased to follow your suggestion, Madame . . . if you are quite sure that you want me to stay."

"That is already settled," said Joan, with a brisk nod of her head which indicated finality.

"Then I may as well confess the truth, and say that I am exceedingly happy. You know that there is one word in the English language which has no exact equivalent in the French, and which is — with the exception of 'Mother' — to us the most beautiful of all in meaning. That is the word, 'home,' which signifies so much more than your 'maison' — house, or 'foyer' — fireside. There is the thought of a place of safe retreat from the cold winds of the world, of the loving family gathered together there, and the spirit which pervades the whole and makes it the most desirable place on earth, all combined in that simple word. By no means is every house a 'home,' in this fullest sense, but I know that *this* one is. So, you see, I am fortunate, for I have found my way into a real 'home.'"

"'Ome." Joan repeated the English word softly, and to Daniel it seemed as though she imparted to it an even deeper meaning than he had himself

ascribed. "Yes, it is a pretty word, and you make it tell a pleasant story. Monsieur is a poet, I think."

"I? A poet? No, indeed. Just plain man," smiled Daniel.

"Ah, but the English is so difficult; one of your words has so many ideas in it, and they are all so hard to pronounce. Why do you not speak the words as they are spelled, the way we do, Monsieur?"

"You are not the first to ask me that question, Mlle. Joan, and I wonder if I can open your eyes in surprise, as I have the others. It is true that we do not *always* pronounce as we spell, though I think that we generally do, but do *you*, Mademoiselle?"

"But certainly."

"What are your mother and sister doing?" He drew a pencil from his pocket, wrote the answer to his question, in French, "*Elles travaillent, n'est-ce pas?*" and passed it to the wondering girl.

"El traveye, nes pa?" she read phonetically. "Yes, but . . . "

Smiling, Daniel proceeded to draw a line through each of the eleven letters which had not figured in her pronunciation, and Joan's cheeks slowly dimpled into a responsive smile. "Ah, you have trapped me well, Monsieur. I never thought of it

before, but there are many letters which we do not pronounce at all in certain places. Now I can see why it is that strangers speak so funnily our language."

"If you really want to learn English, I shall be only too delighted to help you — and sister Suzette, also — on the evenings when I am at *home,* and, after you have made a little start, you will find that it is really very easy. Our constructions are much simpler than yours, we are not bothered with the different genders, and our verbs get along without terminations, with one exception which is easy to remember. Besides, although there are many more words in English than in French, nearly three thousand, which come originally from the Latin, are practically the same in both languages, except for the pronunciation. But you must help me with my French, in exchange."

"Gladly, Monsieur. Although you already speak our beautiful tongue much more fluently than most foreigners. Oh, it will be great fun!"

With her eyes sparkling, and red lips parted she momentarily leaned over the table close to him. Her shoulder barely touched his, but he felt as though there had been established an instantaneous magnetic contact, which thrilled him to the fingertips, amazed, delighted and frightened him.

"This won't do at all," he said to himself. "If I'm really a fool, it is a good thing to find it out in time, and fight against my folly." With the thought came an inspired solution — or so it seemed to Daniel at the moment.

"Good, it is agreed. And I'll begin right now by teaching you another word that — in the sense in which I mean to use it — has no counterpart in French, I'm told."

"And that word is . . . ?"

"'Pals.' What you and I are going to be, I hope. It means about the same as 'comrades,' but with perhaps a shade more of the idea of frank and friendly intimacy in it. I have been told that, in France, it is not thought possible for a man and a girl to . . . to . . . " his explanation began to become confused and embarrassed, " . . . to be like that — a sort of brother and sister — without playing the part of . . . of . . . lovers. But in America it is quite the usual thing, and perhaps that is why . . . is why . . . "

He stopped altogether, and Joan, both laughing and blushing, answered, "I think I know what you mean, Monsieur. And that is why the girls in America do not always have to be chaperoned, and can have so much better times than we in France. Yes,

I will like that. Listen while I say it. We are 'pals,' now. Is that right?"

"Exactly right, and we must shake hands on it, as they say at home." She gave his hand a warm, friendly pressure, which set his blood to leaping again, and he rather hastily withdrew it from her clasp.

"Ah, but you are amusing, Monsieur. I think that you are as bashful as a girl. Still, I like thee," she added, unconsciously dropping into the language of intimate friendship.

"Good, then I am fortunate in a thousand ways."

"It is we who are fortunate, Monsieur," interrupted Madame le Jeune, who had been listening to the conversation, with amusement and perplexity intermingled. "It is pleasant again to have a youth in our family circle — our ''ome.'" She repeated the English word diffidently, and Daniel saw the shadow of a great grief pass, like a fleeting cloud, across her face. He understood its meaning, and was silent.

After a moment, he addressed her. "Then, as Mlle. Joan has said, it is settled, but you must, of course, permit me to pay you for . . . "

"But no. No, no," chorused the other three, Madame, Joan and Suzette. "A friend of our Henri . . . "

"Thank you, I appreciate your kindness, but truly this time I could not accept. We are supposed to pay our way always, you see, and the Society to which I belong settles all necessary accounts."

"Ah, in that case, and if Monsieur insists . . ." There was another whispered conference, and then Madame inquired, hesitatingly, "Would Monsieur think five francs too much for the room?"

"Five francs a day?" He had been moving from place to place for so long that he had forgotten how to think in terms of a domicile, and the figure startled him a little.

"A day? No, no, for the week, Monsieur, and the grandmother shall do your laundry with our own." It was Joan who answered this time, and Daniel could barely keep from smiling at the expression of distress on her countenance. And, as he mentally translated the sum into American currency, he found himself wishing that every homesick and embittered doughboy who had ever declared that France was a nation of robbers might have been present at that moment; whereupon he actually did smile, for he knew how few of the A. E. F. had ever been granted the opportunity to learn the true heart of France, and his imagination assembled an audience of some two million men to their simple

transaction. "Five francs." At the existing rate of exchange that was well under one dollar a week, for such a room and such a bed, for the warmth of a fire and the more precious warmth of friendship!

"It is far too little, Madame — it is nothing. Of course you must allow me to pay more than that."

"Not a single *sou*, Monsieur. All that I might ask is, that if Monsieur goes away from time to time, as he has said would be the case, and on his trips eats with the soldiers, or in cafés, he permit us to purchase the sugar that is allowed to him and which he does not use." It was the frugal French housewife who spoke now. "Indeed, Monsieur, I should be happy to take charge of securing your allotment for you, after you have obtained the card."

"Most certainly, if you will agree to consider it my small donation to the family, which has made me a part of itself," replied Daniel, and he thought of many other gifts of welcome provender which he might make if ever his trips took him to a town where was located an American army commissary.

"Then truly is it settled. Come, Joan, get thy shawl. If thou dost not hasten the Mayor will have left his bureau. He is also the principal of the village school, and himself teaches the older boys who are too unruly for the mesdemoiselles, his daughters," she added, in explanation to Daniel.

The man, in his heavy storm boots, and the girl, in her *sabots,* were soon clumping together down the hillside toward a group of children, who were laggardly moving in the direction of school and filling the last precious moments of freedom with human sleighing races, for the purpose of which one of a pair played the part of steed and the other that of driver and equipage combined by squatting upon his, or her, wooden-shod heels. The crisp air was filled with merry cries and childish laughter.

The voice of one, calling, "Look, an American!" put an abrupt end to the game, and the participants clustered together in a group by the roadside, half shy, half eager, but all curious.

"There are the two small sisters of thy friend, Monsieur Jean," exclaimed Joan, as she pointed out two fascinatingly pretty children, slender and graceful, with wavy hair so black as to suggest a sheen of blue in the sunlight, and big eyes, nearly as dark. "Yes, and there is my little Pierre, the rascal, hiding behind Marie. Good-morning, children," she called aloud.

"Good-morning, Joan," came the response in chorus, and then Georgette, looking up at Daniel from under her dark lashes, and with a mischievous smile dimpling her rosy cheeks, called in English, "*Good*-bye."

"All of the youngsters in France know that expression, I guess, and use it regardless of appropriateness," chuckled the man, as he, in French, returned the intended greeting.

"Marie, Georgette and little Pierre, come hither. You must bid good-morning properly to the American Monsieur, who is a friend of your brother Jean, and helped to take care of him when he was the last time wounded," announced his companion.

The two girls approached shyly, and each placed a small hand in Daniel's outstretched ones; but the boy showed no embarrassment. Rather, he leaned confidently against the man's legs, tilted his chubby, soiled face upward, and, with a cherubic smile, inquired ingratiatingly. "Chew'n gum?"

"No 'chew'n gum' this morning, my little one. I'm sorry."

The light of expectancy faded from the small countenance, and the cherubic lips replied, "Damn."

Daniel's expression of shocked amusement at the expletive, coming from such a source, must have conveyed something of the unintelligible word's meaning to Joan, for she apologized, "He's only a baby, Monsieur, and perhaps thy countrymen who were here last spring taught him to say some naughty words, is it not so?"

"It certainly is. You had better tell him to eliminate that particular word from his English vocabulary."

"Ah well, soldiers will be soldiers — "

"'Full of strange oaths,'" quoted Daniel mentally.

"— and he is so comical that they all spoiled him, by playing with him constantly, and giving him many bonbons and other things. We love the children dearly, but I think that the Americans make more of them, than do the French."

"Listen, Pierre. It is not a nice English word which thou hast used, but if thou wilt promise me not to say it again, I will surely give thee some bonbons the next time that I see thee, for I have a few in my bag," promised Daniel.

"Good. Then I will not say 'Damn' again, ever, if I may have some bonbons."

"Hark, the bell is ringing. We must all make haste!" Joan exclaimed.

"Quick, then. On my back, Pierre," Daniel cried, and with the boy clinging tightly to his neck, and a shrieking girl dragging at each hand, he headed the troop toward the three storied building which Joan indicated as schoolhouse, Mayor's office and family dwelling combined.

Their errand completed, and with the precious

carte d'alimentation in Daniel's pocket, the two started to retrace their path, but the girl had an errand to perform in the near-by basement shop, and, on reaching it, excused herself for a moment. Left alone, the American stood idly watching the stray hens which were industriously scratching provender through the snow, and now and then his wandering eyes caught glimpses of gray-gowned Sisters, with stiff white headdresses, which half concealed their placid faces, as they passed and repassed the windows within the severely plain convent, beside the church.

His attention was shortly attracted to a more stirring sight, however, for around the corner swung the head of a battalion of French infantry, in full field equipment, but marching without music, or drums. Even now that peace had come, the appearance of armed men *en route* still thrilled him, and he eagerly studied the brown, bearded or mustached faces that filed by him with scarcely a glance. Around the left shoulder of each was looped the *fourragère* of twisted red cord, which proclaimed that the regiment to which it belonged had been cited to wear the color of the Legion of Honor, for repeated deeds of exceptional bravery, and the breasts of many of the individuals were adorned with the bars of the *Croix de Guerre* and the *Me-*

daille Militaire. Three months had passed since the fighting ceased, but these stern-visaged men, who had faced four years of horror at the Marne, the Aisne, in Belgium, Verdun and Chateau Thierry, perhaps, still bore the ineffaceable lines of suffering and indomitable resolve, around their lips and eyes.

The command " Halt " was passed down the column of fours, and the *poilus* instantly relaxed, dropped their rifle butts to the snow, hitched up their packs, and relighted the inevitable cigarettes. Daniel walked a few paces down the line, until he was arrested by Joan's voice, calling, " I am now ready, Monsieur Steele."

" So? " spoke a deep voice just behind him, and he turned to recognize the sentry with whom he had conversed the previous night. " I see that Monsieur succeeded in finding the house of the family which he sought. Good. Perhaps now if *I* return in the week's time, he will tell *me* where dwell the le Jeunes, for I observe that there are some pretty daughters there — or at least one."

" And do you then expect to return so soon? It appears to me as though you were departing altogether."

" Yes, it is so. We go into Germany to take our place in the army of occupation. The *Boche* ' Gret-

chens ' will not be as pretty as yonder Mademoiselle, I'm afraid."

"Too bad. But if you are leaving Mirabelle I should now have no trouble in finding a chamber here, if it were necessary."

"There will be plenty of room for a day or two, perhaps, but other troops will replace us, without doubt. The barracks are well built, and the position strategic, if the enemy plays false."

"Attention!"

"*Au revoir,* Monsieur, and felicitations, for the pretty mademoiselle awaits you."

"*Au revoir,* and a pleasant journey."

"Forward march!" The column moved on, and Daniel rejoined the waiting Joan. As they turned the corner towards home, they came suddenly upon old Barbette, in the act of sweeping a path through the snow from her little cabin to the road, and he saw on the platform a pale, pitiably thin child, with deeply shadowed eyes and drooping lips — the countenance of which he had caught a fleeting glimpse through the window-pane the evening before. One startled look at him, and she scurried indoors like a frightened hare to its burrow.

The old woman shrieked a malediction after her, and then, with a twisted smile which revealed a few

odd, discolored teeth, turned to Daniel, and said, "Ah, Monsieur, she runs thus from every stranger, for to her they are all *Boche*."

"And she is then especially afraid of the Germans?"

"Aye, and with good cause, but I will not think on those things now. 'Tis better not." The thin lips closed grimly.

"I will tell thee the story some day, perhaps," whispered Joan, with her lips close to his ear.

"And so the American stays in Mirabelle, with the le Jeune family and Mademoiselle Joan, eh? Well, old Barbette knew that it would be so, she knew."

"*How* did you know? I did not myself, until a little while ago," demanded Daniel, with curiosity and growing exasperation both evident in his voice. But the hag merely shook her head, and began to mutter, and wield her broom of twigs furiously. With a "Good-morning, Madame," in parting, the pair started to move on.

It was still sufficiently early so that the morning sun was only a little above the rim of eastern hills, and its bright, slanting rays cast clean-cut patches of shade on the white ground. As Daniel faced the west to mount the hillside, old Barbette's cackling laugh sounded behind him, and he heard her

call, "Be careful, Monsieur. You are stepping towards it."

"Towards what?" he demanded sharply.

"Your shadow, Monsieur," was the mocking reply.

CHAPTER XIII

CONVERGING PATHS

Once more it was eventide, and once more Daniel was headed toward Mirabelle, but with anticipations how different from those which had been his when he had first approached the village. Then, he had been weary, cold, and uncertain of what greeting awaited him there; now, he looked confidently forward to a friendly welcome in a spot which had already assumed the name of "home" in all his thoughts. Four days had passed since he left it, four busy days in which he had visited by rail, by foot, or motor trucks encountered by chance, most of his new territory. Somehow, the blackened ruins and bare walls, which stood so naked and deserted amid the bleak winter landscape, had touched his heart even more poignantly than before, as he viewed the frozen desolations, and mentally compared what he beheld, with his mind picture of what they once had been — contented, peaceful places, like Mirabelle.

"BLACKENED RUINS AND BARE WALLS . . . AMID THE BLEAK WINTER LANDSCAPE"

Toward that hamlet, whose quaint charm had already captivated him, still almost a stranger to it, his thoughts had reverted often during the evenings which he had passed in the chilly, overcrowded inn of some partly razed town, or another. And he had never sought his uncomfortable bed without thinking covetously of the wonderful one which awaited him there — warmed by a stone jug placed at its foot by mother le Jeune, its thick covers turned down by the hand of Joan, and close beside it, a friendly fire kindled by his host.

The strong hold which his new friendship had taken upon his heart, found expression in a long letter that he wrote to Faith at this time. In it he described in detail his arrival at Mirabelle, even to quoting the first, and pleasant, part of old Barbette's prophecy. He expatiated at length upon the kindness of the le Jeune family to him, but, when he came to write of them individually, he caught himself being swayed by an odd temptation to make only a passing mention of the girl Joan. Angry at himself, he finally described her to a greater degree than was in the least necessary. He told of her loveliness of face, her sweetness and natural charm, and then — manlike, and afraid that he had said too much — went as far out of his way in the other direction, to assure the one who owned his allegiance

that she need have no fear that this, or any other woman, no matter how fascinating, could have any possible appeal to one who had known, and loved, and been loved by *her*. It's said that woman's name is inconsistency, with the inference that the male is a consistent creature, but if he is, the ordinary one is consistently absurd — where women are concerned. And when this epistle reached Faith, a month later, the ardent protestations thrilled her; and if her womanly intuition read aught between the lines which troubled her, her reply did not disclose the fact, even by inference, for she did not find it necessary to reaffirm her steadfast trust in him. Rather, she wrote sweetly of her own happiness in the fact that he was so happy in his new home, and ended by asking him to give her love to Joan. But much water had flowed under the bridge before Daniel received that letter.

On the evening of this fourth day Daniel was once more approaching Mirabelle, this time by the road that led from the little railway station of the village on the further side of the Moselle. The hamlet, which straggled up the hillside from the river's edge in front of him, was silhouetted against a glowing sunset background, and looked more like a painting than a real place, with its picturesque skyline of deep red roofs, the rich blues and violets

of the shadows on its clustered walls, and with here and there a touch of pink in spots where snow reflected the warm light. To add a bit of life to the scene, the beautiful Moselle wound through the nearer snow-clad field, its rippling waters, and tiny rapids, many-colored. The picture bred a great contentment within the man.

As he exchanged the still-sunlit plain for the heavy shadows within the village, and turned into the main street, he saw before him in the distance, winding down the road which curved over the nearer hills, a thin dark line which, as he watched, resolved itself into a rapidly approaching column of horses, guns and wagons. The cavalcade came on at so fast a trot, that before Daniel had reached his turning point, the leaders were almost upon him. He saw that the foremost team of horses, urged forward by the lumbering gun that bounded and rattled at their heels, was practically out of control, and plunging badly. The rider of the near horse, and the driver on the seat of the limber, were making desperate efforts to slow them down, and swing them around the right angle turn. But their shouts and sawing on the bits only excited the sweating, plunging animals the more. Not knowing what might happen, and decidedly uneasy on his own account — for he was caught between a row of

buildings on either side — Daniel made haste to press himself close against one of the walls, and then, for the first time, realized that he was not alone there.

Two other figures were huddled in the deep shadows. A single glance enabled him to recognize in one the crooked form of old Barbette, and he assumed that the other was the strange child. But he had time for one look only. Then he saw the rider lean over, and smash his clinched fist viciously into the nostrils of the off horse; saw a mounted officer, with the expression of a devil on his face, spur up beside the offender and seize his wrist in a passionate grip; saw the newcomer's steed rear and pivot under the check-rein; and saw its flank strike the cowering child, and send her headlong to the ground.

The tragic action began and ended almost simultaneously, and Daniel viewed it as something occurring in a nightmare, the gloomy shadows on one side, and the unnatural light of dying day on the other, intensifying the effect. His mind was in action, while his body seemed to be bound to the wall against which he had pressed himself. Then his nerves and muscles responded to the call of his brain, and he was also in the midst of the group that had become a melée. He found himself at

one time trying to lift the silent child from the snow, restrain old Barbette, who was making matters worse by shrieking maledictions at the officer and beating both him and his mount with her bony fists, and prevent the horse from rearing again and injuring them all.

The column had closed up behind them, shouting drivers were endeavoring to calm their own horses, which had become infected with the spirit of panic, and others had jumped from the gun carriages, and were running up to assist. For an instant, pandemonium was loose in the dark and narrow street. Then Daniel somehow succeeded in backing free with his burden, and in pulling after him the old woman, whose straggly hair had fallen over her face and whose lip was bleeding, where she herself had bitten it. There was the look of one of the Furies on her face.

But the man was more concerned over the child, who lay rigid in his arms, her eyes closed, and the blood seeping from a cut on her forehead, that had been made, doubtless, by the rough wall against which she had struck in falling.

For an instant he believed that she was dead. Then tremors began to pass through her wasted body, and her breath to come in convulsive, soundless sobs. With a sense of immense relief, he sur-

rendered her into Barbette's skinny arms, and the old hag began to rock and croon over her with an unsuspected tenderness. Then the officer, who had dismounted and left his horse in charge of a soldier, joined them.

"God, I was so angry at that —— driver that I didn't see the little one at all, Madame — I had eyes only for that fool. I am desolate, and hope that she is not hurt. Here, please take this." He drew from his pocket a handful of small silver coins and held them out to her, but old Barbette freed one arm, and struck the offering so sharp a blow that the money flew in every direction, and she began to shriek at him again.

He laughed at her foul abuse, and turned to Daniel, who was now leaning against the wall, gingerly nursing one arm, which had been severely bruised during the affair. "And you, Monsieur, if you had not quickly and courageously interposed your own strong body, worse might have happened, so I thank you. You are not injured, I trust?"

From the shadows which concealed his face, Daniel answered, "No, I am not hurt, and you have no occasion to thank me. I am only too glad that I was present. But let this teach you a lesson, my lieutenant, that the innocent are often made to suf-

fer with the guilty, when a man loses his temper in the way you have just done."

"*Mon Dieu,* is it then my American, Monsieur Steele? But I am glad to see you, even if you read me a moral lecture at the very moment of our meeting." He sprang forward, and clasped Daniel's hand heartily. "I was at fault; yes, I admit it, but I have a hasty temper, and when it is aroused I see everything red. I am sorry for what happened, but not that I was angry — indeed, I rejoice in the knowledge that I possess a temper for use when the occasion requires, whereas I wager that you, my mild-mannered friend, do not know whether you have one, or not."

"Perhaps I would prefer to be wanting in that regard, Monsieur. You forget that my sect tries to follow the commandment of the Master, in all respects, and forgiveness is the cardinal Christian virtue."

"Without doubt; but, if I remember my Bible correctly, even He, himself, once whipped the money changers from the temple."

"Their offense was not against Him . . . " began Daniel.

"Nor was this fool's offense against *me,*" answered Villier, triumphantly. "Of course I am sorry for the girl — although the old woman amuses

me — but I assure you that if I should to-morrow see another brute strike a horse, which I worship, I should undoubtedly ride down another child, if it happened to stand between me and the object of my anger. This man shall be well punished, although perhaps you would like to beg that clemency be shown him, Monsieur," he finished, with a faint tinge of sarcasm in his words.

"A man who sins must suffer, truly, but I might ask you to remember that *his* temper was responsible for what he did, and he was sorely tried."

At this serious statement the lieutenant burst into a hearty laugh, and he clapped Daniel on the shoulder. "It is worse than hopeless to argue with you, my friend, but I'll never get over the delight of doing it, nevertheless. Come, tell me what you are doing here, of all places. You are the last person on earth whom I should have expected to meet in this God-forsaken hole, where we are doomed to spend the rest of the winter in quarters — no amusement, no society, no women except the dull village girls. *Bon Dieu,* but I shall die of ennui."

"Possibly that is how Mirabelle appeals to you, Monsieur," responded Daniel, suddenly transformed into a champion of the spot which had exercised so strong an appeal on him. "To me it seems like a

delightful haven, after the places in which I have been living."

"So it's like that? And do you then mean that you, too, are staying here? What luck! The Fates are kinder to me than I thought, since I shall have you to amuse me. And, inasmuch as you take offense so strongly at my frank characterization of Mirabelle, it must be that you have discovered here some attraction which is hidden from the casual view — some jewel, worth another's seeking, is it not so? Ah, it is; I read the answer in your face, which was not made for dissembling. '*Cherchez la femme,*' as we Frenchmen always say, in such a case; is it that you have here found the village Mademoiselle, concerning whose appealing simplicity I once warned you? Aha, still waters. But you have my felicitations."

Daniel hesitated. He was disturbed and angry, both at himself and the questioner, although he suspected that the latter was merely baiting him. The arrival of a young *poilu*, leading Villier's horse, brought what promised to be a welcome intervention. But the promise failed, for the lieutenant — now in high good humor again — turned to the new arrival, who had saluted both men, and cried, "Behold, Jean, these Americans are too rapid for us. We come to a village hoping to find at least one

pretty Mademoiselle to entertain us, and lo, one of them is here before us, and has, without doubt, already selected the best for himself. You remember Monsieur Steele, do you not?"

"But certainly, my lieutenant, we are already friends. Did I not say that we would surely meet again, Monsieur?"

"You did, and I am glad that you have proved to be a true prophet. Has Jean told you that he probably saved my life in Verdun?"

"I have not told it, because it is not true, Monsieur."

"Well, I am glad that you are to be here, and I'm sure that *you* consider yourself fortunate to be sent to Mirabelle, even if Lieutenant Villier does not."

"Ah yes, the dear God is kind to me, for I can now see my little sisters and brothers, daily. And then there is yet another reason why I am well content to be here."

"And that is . . . ?"

"Cannot Monsieur guess? You have heard of my comrade's sister, Joan; perhaps you have seen her, if you have been here long, and . . . "

There was something about the odd expression which came into the American's face, which caused him to pause. At the same time old Barbette and

the child, who was now able to walk slowly, slunk away, and their departure gave Daniel a brief moment in which to control his features and remove the look of surprise from his countenance. He had been shocked at the unreasonable feeling of sudden jealousy which had followed Jean's simple declaration, and he now forced himself to respond with almost boisterous good will, "So, the wind blows that way? If Mlle. Joan is a victim of the same contagious malady, you are indeed fortunate, for she is everything that is fine and fair."

"You have met her, then?" exclaimed Jean, his face lighting up joyfully.

"Met her? Is it not my good fortune to have found a chamber in the house of the kind le Jeunes? And have I not already told her that you and I are friends?"

"Perhaps she asked about me, Monsieur?" queried the *poilu* eagerly.

"Perhaps she has, who knows," was Daniel's enigmatical reply.

"Truly? Ah, I am glad, and glad, too, that I shall be able to see you often, for we are to occupy the barracks almost across the street."

The lieutenant, who had stepped aside to address the offending and chastened driver, returned in time to hear the last sentence. "So you are also living on

the *Rue du Mont?* Good. You will be able to dine often at my *popote,* where we shall renew our innumerable discussions, and you can, at the same time, learn that Jean, here, is able to cook an omelet as well as he can point a gun. In return, you must promise to introduce me to your village belle, and we shall then see whether she prefers the Parisian, or the priest. *Au revoir,* Monsieur Steele, we arrive late, and there is much to be done to-night, but to-morrow you must come and see me. Am I not generous? I give you one more free night, in which to play your hand without a rival."

He remounted gracefully, wheeled, and spurred away, followed by Jean, who ran to take his place on the gun limber, leaving Daniel with strangely mixed feelings of pleasure and disquietude. He knew the way of the French officer of city birth, and Villier's jest about the unknown girl contained the possibility of a threat, and both it, and the *poilu's* frank avowal, certainly promised to interfere with the pleasant comradeship which he had pictured as growing up between Joan and himself.

With quite different sensations in his heart than those which had been there a few moments previous, he turned up the *Rue du Mont,* beside the now slowly moving column.

The sight of Barbette's tiny cabin brought his

mind back to the recent event, that had so barely escaped a tragic ending, and he climbed to the little platform, and knocked on the door. It was opened a crack by the old woman, who peered out, with a look of hostility on her aged face, but this cleared when she discovered the identity of the visitor. She drew the door wide open, and beckoned for him to enter. He was forced to stoop low in order to escape the top of the door, and even within the room was unable to stand upright. Every imaginable sort of odds and ends, mostly broken, cluttered up the tiny place, it seemed to Daniel, but he paid scant attention to his surroundings. For, close to one side, lying on a rude cot made of what had once been two chairs, was the strange and pitiable child, who regarded him unblinkingly, through big scared eyes. Her hair, falling over them, and the dark blue shadows about them, made them appear like those of some little wild thing cowering within a thicket.

Still, she did not shrink, this time, when the man crouched down, took one of her frail, transparent hands in his, and asked her, gently, how she felt.

"Answer him, thou!" shrieked the old woman, but, as the girl remained dumb, she continued more mildly and with a tone of apology, "You must excuse her, Monsieur, for she is very timid. But

look, she fears you no longer. See?" The child was softly patting Daniel's hand. "It is her way of thanking you for saving her life, yes, for saving her life. And now old Barbette has yet another kindness to repay you for, some day."

"She was not seriously hurt, mother?" he asked.

"Hurt? No, she was not hurt, Oh, ho-ho, is she not the devil's child, and does not the devil always look after his own?" Daniel was shocked at her words and mirthless laugh, and the girl winced visibly. He was moved to voice a stern rebuke, but before he could speak, the old woman had dropped to her knees and begun to fondle the girl, and mutter soothing endearments.

"I am so sorry for the little one, Madame. Won't you take this, and get something to amuse her . . . a little *poupée* or perhaps some sweets?" he asked, utterly at a loss to understand the scene.

"No, Monsieur, we cannot accept more of your money, but as soon as it is fully dark, old Barbette will return to the corner, and, on her knees, seek in the snow for the coins which she struck from the officer's hand. Old Barbette cannot be bribed, but what she finds, is hers, is it not so? And he shall pay, ah yes, the lieutenant shall pay in anguish and bitterness of soul, and we will laugh — the little one and I. Old Barbette knows, she knows." Again

she fell a-muttering, and was, perhaps, unaware when Daniel rather hastily departed.

He walked rapidly to his new home, and, once he was inside it, all the disturbing shadows of the previous moments fled from his mind before the warmth and brightness of the family welcome.

But he had much news to relate, during the course of the simple meal, in which they insisted that he join them, and there were many excited exclamations and a little laughter over his story. To be sure, the knowledge that the new arrivals were members of the battery to which Henri had belonged, brought a momentary shade of pain, for they could not but think of the joy which would have been theirs, to have had him so near them. Still, they were able to rejoice in Jean's good fortune, and Joan's eyes and cheeks were bright, as she inquired, "And he is well and strong again, Monsieur? Ah, I am glad."

Finally, he briefly recounted his experience in old Barbette's cabin, and asked if they knew the explanation of her strange words and stranger behavior.

"Yes, every one in Mirabelle knows, Monsieur," responded Joan, hesitantly. "It is not a pleasant story, but perhaps it would be better if Monsieur understood, for it is otherwise hard not to blame old

Barbette — who is really not to blame for what she may do, or say. It is again the war, Monsieur. It is said that once she was very pretty, in spite of her twisted back, and she was a gypsy fortune-teller in the South of France, where there is much money. She was frugal, and very well-to-do when the war commenced. She had two daughters, one very, very lovely, and much younger than the other, who was the mother of the poor little girl, the father of whom was . . . a *Boche.* They lived all together in one of the villages yonder, in great contentment, and all men regarded him as a good husband and father. But he was *Boche,* and a devil slept within his heart. So when war was declared he stole all of old Barbette's money and escaped into Germany, where he re-entered the army of his Fatherland. It killed the poor wife, and started to turn the brain of the old grandmother, Monsieur; but it was only the beginning of horrors for her. For soon he came back, not alone, but with thousands of his countrymen. They swept over the little village, which had for years been home to him; they ravaged and burned; they killed his former neighbors, and he laughed to see them die. And then, Monsieur, they . . . Oh, I cannot tell you, but his own sister-in-law — that beautiful young girl — was made to die also, and he . . . "

There was a strained silence in the room, and Daniel felt the blood pounding hotly in his temples.

"Old Barbette saw it all. Then she managed to escape and hide herself and the little one, who was scarcely more than a baby then, in the cellar of her ruined home. And later she got away, the good God alone knows how, and came here on foot through the night, for the Germans were stopped just the other side of those near-by hills, as Monsieur knows. So one cannot blame old Barbette, can one, Monsieur? And we try to be very kind to her, although it is sometimes difficult."

And Daniel nodded with a new understanding.

CHAPTER XIV

THE SINGERS

ANOTHER week had added itself to the caravan of passing days; again Daniel was homeward headed, after a more extended tour of his new region than he had made during his first visit to it, and hastening with a joyful heart toward the magnetic pole of his thoughts.

He came to the corner, in the shadows of which tragedy had lurked on the previous occasion, and, as he turned it, he found a group of children, including his especial friends, standing in unnatural silence before old Barbette's tiny cabin. There was awe and interest on every small face.

"Why so quiet, my little ones?" he called out, cheerfully.

Georgette ran forward, and slipped her hand into his. Then nodding towards the cabin, she whispered, "The strange little girl, Rose, is dying in there, Monsieur."

Daniel was shocked, but, before he could ask a question, Pierre broke in with eager impetuosity, "My Joan said that she is going up to Paradise, and I am watching to see her go. Do you think that she will come right through the roof, Monsieur American?"

"Hush, Pierre. It is wicked to talk like that about people who are going to Paradise," chided his elder sister, as she placed her hand over the loquacious mouth. "This morning I took her my best *poupée*, which Jean found for me in Verdun, and I love the most of all, but she would not look at it. Do you think that the old witch will give it back to me?" she added, wistfully.

"Yes, I think so," replied Daniel. "Now all of you run away and play. It is not nice to stand and stare like this."

The children moved slowly off for a few paces, and then turned, to continue their watch, as the man climbed the platform steps.

Old Barbette had seen him coming, and she softly opened the door. Within the single diminutive room sat one of the placid nursing sisters from the near-by convent, her hands folded over a crucifix on her lap, from which her eyes did not waver, even when the visitor spoke.

"They tell me that the little one is very ill,

Madame. Is it true? Is there anything that I can do to help you?"

"No, Monsieur, no one can do anything, now. But it is just as well, just as well. She will be happier in Paradise than with old Barbette, and I think that there is enough French in her soul to save her from hell."

"The soul knows no nationality, Madame," he answered.

"You think not? The *Boche* say that there is a German God, so there must be a German soul."

Not wishing to argue with her, he inquired, "Is it . . . is the trouble . . ."

"The soldier doctor said that she was not injured by her fall; he would say so anyway, and I do not know. But since that night she has faded slowly away, like a bruised flower, and neither he, nor old Barbette — who knows of curing herbs that are better than any which the physicians give — has been able to help her. But I hold no regrets. The part of her that I hate, will die, and that which I love will live on forever, and be again with her sainted mother, who was also a martyr on earth. Old Barbette knows; has He not told her that it would be so?"

"'He?'"

"But yes, the *bon Dieu,*" came the simple answer.

"I am sorry . . . No, perhaps it is better that I be glad, with you, Madame. But if there is anything that I can do, you will call on me?"

"I thank you, Monsieur, but there is nothing, nothing."

The old woman had been speaking more calmly than Daniel had ever heard her speak before, but the placid look suddenly left her eyes, and her strange face twisted horridly. "He has killed her, the lieutenant has killed my little Rose, but he will pay, his soul will sweat with the tortures of the damned, and then old Barbette will laugh." The uncanny cackling which the man had heard several times before, and which sent a creepy sensation down his back, began again, and he hastily withdrew, to seek the happier welcome which he knew awaited him at the top of the *Rue du Mont.*

* * * * * * * *

A detailed record of the incidents of the two months which followed would furnish but variations upon one theme, a simple composition based on the life and labor of every day, with familiar strains of Love's Old Sweet Song in it, little trills of laughter, and a deeper obbligato, which carried a note of pain and struggle.

There was a chorus to complete the harmonies, but three persons furnished the leading parts.

It was Joan, whose life sang the lighter melody, for, except when her thoughts turned toward the little graveyard across the way, she was very happy. The familiar cottage had an element of new enchantment because of the presence there, at intervals, of the American, who had become for her the dearest comrade imaginable, and the presence almost constantly of the brave and gay young *poilu,* who, without the need of spoken words, proclaimed himself her suitor. And surely he was one of whom any girl in Joan's place might well have been proud. Her happy thoughts made play of the daily tasks which were hers to perform, for when one's mind is filled with air castles which it is perpetually building, mundane matters can find but little place in it — a fact which was often exasperatingly apparent to her mother, who would catch her day-dreaming, with her embroidery held in idle hands, and cry, "Joan, what art thou thinking of, to be so idle? Dost thou not remember that the price of everything was never so high as to-day, that it daily goes higher, and that only by all of us working ceaselessly, can we live at all? Thou, who wert ever so common-sensed and so industrious, hast changed into something which thy mother cannot understand. Is it, then, that the American has filled thy empty head with foolish visions of a country, not like our poor France, but

where every one is rich — thou rememberest the letter of thy brother Henri? Dost thou dream of being a fine lady, dressed in silks and the fine linen, such as we embroider, but cannot afford to wear?"

"No, my mother, it is not of that, that I dream," Joan would answer, as, flushed of face, she rebusied herself with her work.

"Perhaps of that *poilu,* Jean Harent, then. Is it not bad enough that he is here at all hours, taking up thy time with his foolishness, without thy thinking more foolishness concerning him, when he is absent? I shall certainly speak to *Monsieur le Commandant,* and ask him, for the love of God, to give his men something to do to keep them busy, for they are a lazy lot, now that the fighting is over, and they have only to eat and sleep, and draw pay from France for doing it."

"That is not their fault, my mother, and surely they have earned the right to rest for a while. Besides, what is twenty-five centimes a day?"

"Yes, what is twenty-five centimes a day? It is nothing, in this age — especially it is nothing to dream of marriage on," she would add, pointedly.

"And who is dreaming of marriage? Not I!" Joan would toss her pretty head, airily.

But whether she spoke the full truth, or not, there was one who did dream of it, night and day.

Jean had come to stay in Mirabelle, rejoicing in the thought that he was to be close to the girl who, seen but once; had spoken to his young heart with the voice of a simple siren, and every day thereafter the ship of his life was drawn nearer and nearer to the passionate rapids which would sweep it on to the rocks where it might be dashed to pieces, or caught, and safely held. He wished for no wax with which to stop his ears against the song of the siren, no rope with which to bind himself to the restraining mast.

He heard other voices; the sharp military commands of his officers, the boisterous talk, and loud laughter of his companions and the every-day converse of the villagers, but they merely furnished rude interruptions to the love song that his heart was everlastingly singing.

For a time he had been quite content to dwell in the land of dreams, for his anticipations were perfect, more perfect, he knew, than their realization might be, for they were what he made them, while life is subject to many things beyond one's control, and such forces are not always kindly ones.

Besides, the thought of that twenty-five centimes a day was a deterrent to speech. Yes, it was altogether better to wait for a little while. He had served more than his three required years under the

tri-color, and, in a few months, at the most, he would be demobilized and free again. He had no fear of the future; the natural optimism and courage of youth saw to that. Perhaps he would settle down in Verdun, and ply his old trade for the benefit of the many visitors who would be sure to come there, to view the battlefields; perhaps he would remain in Mirabelle. Men were scarce, economic readjustment would occur in time, and he would grow prosperous, become a landowner, a substantial citizen of the place, perhaps even the Mayor — and then his children would be very proud of him.

As the days passed, however, a discordant note marred his song, a shadow crept into his bright dreams, and made him decide to end them, and see if they had been merely dreams. Jealousy is often bred of nothing at all, and in any case its conception is amazingly easy. An idle whisper of gossip is enough to father it, or an intercepted glance, which may have meant nothing. So, at least, it proved with Jean, and his heart was troubled.

There was a third singer, and Daniel's part was the most difficult, and full of troublesome passages.

He strove continually to turn his eyes away from the notes which were engraven on his memory, and to forget the haunting melody in his heart, by increasingly close application to his work. The labor

was hard, interesting, absorbing, and he devoted himself to it so unstintingly that he went back to Mirabelle rarely, and each time more tired in body and mind — a condition which made his powers of resistance to the siren's song less strong. But, Achilles-like, he continued to struggle against it with all the will which he possessed.

Nevertheless, the memory of Faith grew daily more dim, effaced by the image of Joan, which was cut deeper and deeper into his heart. When he was at home, he found it impossible not to be with her almost constantly, and she added to his troubles by seeking his companionship at every chance, for the revelation of the possibility of a frank, natural *camaraderie* between a man and girl, such as he had pictured to her, carried a powerful appeal. Moreover, her active mind craved the knowledge which he was able to impart, especially during their all-too-rare lessons in English.

Joan even appeared a little jealous of the attentions which he paid to Suzette, who had also become very dear to him, and whom he now called his little sister — a term which he could never bring himself to use in respect to Joan. On her part, the younger girl frankly worshipped him.

Daniel and Joan took many walks together, or, during the cozy evenings, sat close side by side over

the same lesson book, which he had bought for her, and the practice themes which she wrote during his absences. They were the cause of much amusement and happy laughter, but one particular exercise lingered persistently in his mind, for it had stirred him deeply because of the picture of her own heart which it carried. She had written it after having given him her word not to look in the vocabulary or dictionary, and to use only words which he had taught her. Its title was:

"A Evening of winter at a happy family's." And it read:

"It is five o'clock. I wak with my mother. The moon shines not yet. Under a gloomy sky, the ground is white. It snows. Br! Br! It is very cold.

"We enter to our friends Mrs. N. 'Good evening!' 'Good evening!' The children bring us chairs, we thank them and we sit down. A good fire is burning in the stove. One lamp lights the room. Here it is bright, it is warm, it is very good.

"Mamma is speaking to Mrs. N. I hear them; and am looking into the room.

"Placed before a little desk, Charles and Mary, the eldest, do their exercises and learn their lessons. They are good pupils, very diligent, who will do pleasure to their parents.

" Daniel, the last born, who has drunk milk, is sitting on his mother's knees. Upon his white lips he spreads his red tongue, he is glad.

" But soon his pretty little eyes shine less, he is sleepy. His mother, who looks him with kindness, is speaking of him, ' He is charming, is it not? ' I think, ' what a happy mamma, but how much good also! '

" I see, under the stove, the slippers of Mr. N. From the kitchen comes a good smell, the supper is made. Everything is ready for arrival of the father.

" Somebody knocks at the door. The children tell, ' it is papa! It is papa! ' It is time for us to go away. We tell good-night to the happy family and we leave, delighted of our evening, we go home."

CHAPTER XV

MORNING

April had come, and Sunday. As Daniel awoke from a long sleep in his comfortable bed, and stretched lazily, in the recollection that it was the day of rest after six days of grinding toil, the feeling of spring in the air pervaded his body with a pleasant languor. Perhaps it was the spring which made his first waking thought turn on Joan, but probably it would have been the same under any circumstances, for she had been in his mind when he went to sleep. Indeed, she was now seldom out of it at all. She was with him, consciously or subconsciously, during his waking and working hours, and he went to sleep to dream of her.

He lay there, beginning to toss restlessly, as the oft-waged battle between his heart, and his allied will and conscience, was renewed, and caught himself thinking, "If I were a painter, and wanted to picture the devil, it would not be as a terrifying

brute with cloven hoofs, horns and a tail, but as the fairest woman I could imagine . . . and that would be Joan." And straightway he laughed over the utter absurdity of the idea of one so simple and so sweet made to represent Satan. "Just the same, there is some foundation for the common saying of men, that women are the very devil, for they are temptation personified."

A gentle rap on the door interrupted his musings, and, when he answered from the depths of his bed, the girl's merry voice called. "Thou art a sleepy-head this marvelous morning, pal of mine. But I do not blame thee for thou must have been very weary last night."

"Why must I have been?" he demanded.

"Because thou wert cross to those who love thee, and I had never seen thee so before."

"Was I? Then I am sorry and apologize humbly, although not on bended knees, because . . . "

"That is where thou shouldst be, and I, as well, for the bells have already ceased their calling to the morning mass, and thither I am bound, as soon as I have delivered a message to thee."

"Is it really so late?" Daniel asked in surprise, as he swung himself half out of bed. "Then I must have slept for twelve solid hours."

"As, indeed, thou hast, which is the reason that I

called thee 'sleepy-head.' But I cannot wait here to talk with thee. I must deliver my message, and run. Monsieur Jean is waiting below, and . . . " Daniel's heart sank. " . . . and he says that the Lieutenant Villier invites thee to take *déjeuner* with them at noon, and will not receive 'no' for the answer, since it is his last day in Mirabelle, and as a soldier. This afternoon he departs to be demobilized, and return to civilian life in Paris. What shall I say that thy reply is to be?"

The man knew that the meal would be an hilarious one, and his Quaker conscience sternly forbade him to be a party to such a festivity on the Sabbath. But Villier was a friend whom he might never see again, and a refusal would appear churlishly discourteous. He was weary of finding himself at all points in conflict with his environment, and, with the thought that it would only be for once, he yielded. " Tell him that I will come . . . gladly," he called.

" Good. I go, but I am blowing thee a kiss through the crack above the door, Monsieur Lazybones." Joan's feet, daintily shod this morning, from the sound on the stairs, pattered away, and Daniel was left alone. The balmy air gently stirred the curtains at the window, birds were singing outside, all nature seemed to have allied itself with his

heart. What was the use of continuing to struggle against the ever-strengthening tide, when it was so much easier to drift? He hurried to the window to catch a glimpse of the girl, whose laughing voice he now heard outside, and, from his position of partial concealment, saw Joan and Jean as they started down the street close together. The soldier's hand was grasping her elbow, and the sight filled him with a senseless anger. Suddenly she turned, caught a glimpse of him, before he could draw back, and tossed him another kiss from her finger-tips. He had a feeling that Jean was rebuking her for her act, for the *poilu* also looked quickly around, and then began to speak rapidly, whereupon the girl withdrew her arm from his grasp.

Another had witnessed the incident, also, — little Pierre, who was once more engaged in his everlasting march up and down the roadway, more completely than ever arrayed as a soldier, for a cast-off canteen of his big brother's dangled against his legs, and part of a knapsack hid his whole back from view, when he reversed. Although Daniel had hurriedly stepped out of sight, the child ran to a spot beneath the window, and called, shrilly, "Good-morning, *Monsieur Americain.* It is a long time since Pierre has seen you. What have you got to give me, to-day? Did you bring me any bonbons?"

There was something irresistible in the naive appeal from the childish lips, and Daniel braved the public eye long enough to lean for a moment from the window, and answer, "Yes, I have some of thy beloved bonbons, which I bought thee at the American army store in Nancy. If thou wilt wait until I am dressed, I will bring them to thee."

"Then I will wait." The lad seated himself on a corner stone of the low curb, a very diminutive Patience on a Monument, and Daniel retired to make his morning toilet. When he went downstairs and out-of-doors, the boy had disappeared, however, to play house with the three-year-old daughter of a neighbor, within the stable aperture of their dwelling, but Daniel's call made him a connubial deserter — another bit of evidence in support of the saying that the way to a man's heart is through his stomach.

"But why art thou not at church, with thy sisters?" he asked as he surrendered a handful of the tinsel-wrapped sweets to the beseeching child.

"I am a soldier, and *they* never go to church," answered Pierre, between munches.

"Indeed? Is not thy big brother Jean a soldier, and did I not see him starting for church, but a few moments ago?"

"Oh, he did not go to *church* — he went merely

to be with Joan, who was going there. He is going to marry her, I think," the boy added, seriously.

"Perhaps Mlle. Joan will have something to say about that," replied the man, and was immediately struck with the absurdity of making such a statement to a six-year-old.

"But of course she will marry him, if he wants her to. He is my brother, Jean," asserted Pierre with finality. "I should like to live with Joan, because she gives me much bread and sugar, and I love her. But I would also like to go to America with you, when you return. Will you take me, Monsieur?"

Daniel had many times told the children of France stories about the wonderland across the sea, and, more than once, had been asked the same question by other little orphans, whose dearest home ties had been broken. And he had had to watch the light of happy expectancy die from their faces, as he answered that he could not make their dreams come true, for France had need of all her children, and would not let them go.

"But if I should take thee with me, what would thy brother Jean do? Would he not be lonesome?" he responded, evasively.

"He would have Joan, and so would not be so *very* lonesome."

"Perhaps. We shall see." Daniel turned abruptly towards the house, leaving Pierre standing with his mouth wide open in surprise, and dripping chocolate.

* * * * * * * *

Mass was ended. Joan and her soldier escort — who walked very erect, and paid no attention to the winks and whispered remarks of a group of his comrades, who were lounging near by — stepped from the cool shadows of the church into the warm spring sunshine.

"Come, I need not return to assist at the *popote* for another half-hour, and thou canst surely give me so short a time, Joan. Let us walk a little way into the country, for truly spring has come to-day, and it has been a long time since it was a pleasure to be out-of-doors," pleaded the man.

Joan demurred for a moment, and pretended that her services were immediately in great demand at home, but it was fairly evident that she hoped her protest would be masterfully overruled; and she was not disappointed.

Side by side, they strolled slowly up the *Rue du Mont,* past Lieutenant Villier's quarters, from the door of which Jean's fellow orderly and chef hailed him to say that there were other things to be done that day beside taking a pretty damoiselle walking,

past the barracks and Joan's own home, and out along the road which quickly dipped down amid the newly tinted fields, and — in the beginnings of its wanderlust — forgot the village where it had been born.

Twice Jean tried to take possession of the girl's hand, and she laughingly snatched it away from him, but her face proclaimed that she was not angry, for the color came and went in her cheeks, and her eyes sparkled mischievously.

"Why dost thou tease me like that?" he finally cried, in manlike exasperation. "Thou knowest that I am not merely playing with thee, Joan."

"'Not playing?'" she echoed, in a tone of innocent surprise. "But it is in games that the children join hands, is it not so?"

"Perhaps, but we are no longer children; at least *I* am not."

"Not children?" she mocked, teasingly.

Half angry, and desperately in earnest, he made a third attempt, and grasped her fingers so firmly that her struggles to free them were futile, whereupon she cried, "How strong thou art, Jean! Thou art hurting me." And he instantly released them, with a word of tender solicitude. "See," she said, holding her hand up very close to his lips. "There are the red marks which thy big, brutal fingers

made." Marks *may* have been there, but he did not pause to make a close examination, rather preferring to apply the ancient remedy immediately, and take no chances. And thereupon a coal black crow, that had been standing in the field beside the road, with his sharp head cunningly tilted and his bright eyes taking it all in, turned, and flapped lazily away, giving utterance to a disgusted caw at such human foolishness. That was clearly not *his* idea of love-making, and he heartily agreed with Puck. But the pair in the roadway were oblivious of his departure, or observation.

"Jean! They are not thy fingers," chided Joan, but the rebuke sounded more like a caress.

"Perhaps not yet, but I mean to make them mine some day, dear heart, for I love thee. Surely thou knowest that."

"If thou hadst not waited until spring came, to tell me so, perhaps I might have believed thee. But any girl knows that she cannot trust the word of a man on such a day as this."

"But thou dost believe me, Joan," he insisted, still retaining her hand, and drawing her a little closer to him. "And I know that thou lovest me, also."

"Then thou knowest more than I do," she answered, as she deftly eluded the arm that was almost

encircling her slim waist. "Perhaps thou art overfull of self-conceit, Monsieur Jean. Has it never occurred to thee that I might love . . . another?"

"Joan!" There was sudden pain and a note of jealousy in the word, and the woman's heart leaped, and laughed, for what woman does not like to tease a man, and thus test his love in such a manner, or play with the fire within it a little, before yielding herself as a sacrifice to the god of the flame? And, indeed, Joan was not quite certain, in her own mind, that she was yet ready to do that. Her young heart had been in a dilemma for many a day, and if it started to trip in faster measure when Jean's step sounded in the entryway, it also grew warm with an affection which might have been sisterly, or maternal, or something different from either, when the strong, quiet, forceful American was near her. If Daniel had never entered her life she would probably have been certain that she loved Jean, who had appealed to her so strongly from the moment of their first meeting, and who, since his arrival in Mirabelle, had been so constant a suitor. But the former brought into the house an element of romance, the appeal of unknown lands, and she frequently asked herself what her heart would answer if he should ever appear in the role of an impetuous lover — a young Lochinvar out of the West — and

always had to give the same answer. She did not know. Not that he had ever, by word or act, suggested such a thing, for, having declared himself her "pal," Daniel had undeviatingly lived up to the name as he had explained it. But her womanly intuition had at times served as a seismograph to register tremors within the man which he had concealed from the eye.

Joan was not fickle in this; she was merely young, a woman, and French. She was made to love, and be loved. Both men appealed to her, each in his way. The appeal of Jean was, perhaps the stronger, because it held the call of kind to kind, but she knew just how he stood and was not quite ready yet to yield her whole heart to him, for Daniel's attitude piqued her. And nothing had happened to stir the hidden depths of her being, and strip her heart and soul bare.

"Joan!" repeated Jean. "Thou lovest the American, Monsieur Steele?"

The girl ignored the question in his voice, and answered, "But thou art very wise this morning, Monsieur. First thou tellest me that I love *thee*, and then that it is the American whom I love. And I have not said that I care for either."

"He does not care for thee as I do, Joan," the man went on, heedless of the interruption. "These

Americans are far from home, and but amuse themselves with the French girls, which is not, perhaps, strange, but they do not marry them. Or if they do, unhappiness is sure to follow for the wife, everything is so different over there."

Joan merely laughed, and Jean became desperate, and, like a drowning man, began to grasp at straws. "Thou hast been unwise, Joan, to have been with him so much, and appeared so intimate. All of the villagers are whispering about it."

The words produced a complete change in the girl and her vexation showed in her voice, as she replied, tartly, "It is not true, and even if it is, I am very angry with thee for listening to their evil gossip, and repeating it to me. We are but comrades — 'pals' — as are all the men and girls in America."

Her opposition merely strengthened him in his error, and he persisted, "A likely story he has told thee! He is but using that as an excuse to be with thee intimately. And it is as I have said: he is only playing with thy heart. Doubtless he is already pledged to some damoiselle at home — he carries a picture of a very beautiful one, for I have seen it."

"And so have I, Monsieur. It is that of his sister," answered Joan, triumphantly.

"Perhaps he has told thee so, but that proves

nothing. And a man does not carry the photograph of a *sister,* next to his heart."

" Monsieur Harent, you are now forgetting yourself." The girl made no attempt to disguise the anger in her voice. " Poor Henri carried my picture like that, and you are insulting one who is a good friend of yours . . . and of mine as well. I am very angry."

Jean knew that he was in the wrong, and that in his anxiety he had gone further than he had meant, but, instead of retracting his words, he rushed blindly on, in his hurt pride and passion, crying, " If he is trifling with you, and any harm comes of it, I shall kill him, even though he be my friend. Do you hear me, Joan? I shall surely kill him."

Suddenly frightened at his vehemence, and realizing that her unwarranted levity had caused its beginning, Joan stretched out her hand with an appealing gesture, and would have taken his. But he was wilfully blind to her act. Turning abruptly, he strode off up the road and left her alone, ashamed and greatly troubled.

As he walked, with the hot blood pounding more and more furiously in his veins, anger — partly at himself, partly at the girl, and partly at Daniel — mounted steadily. Never, even in the heat of the battle, had he felt himself so completely in the grip

of passionate wrath, and the sudden sight of the American, who was playing with his little brother and sisters before the le Jeune cottage, snapped the last thread of his self-restraint.

With fists clinched and working, Jean strode up to him, regardless of the presence of several others, to whom he gave no heed, and scarcely saw, and stilled the friendly greeting which was on Daniel's lips, by shouting, " You're going to keep away from Joan le Jeune. I warn you. You have been seen too much, and too intimately with her, by all of Mirabelle, and if any harm comes to her through you, American, I shall kill you. Remember that."

He turned away, white with passion, and, marshalling the three frightened children before him with a sweep of his long arm, he hurried off, and left Daniel, amazed, troubled and angry.

CHAPTER XVI

NOON

With no very pleasant expectations, Daniel faced the prospect of entering the officers' dining-room, through the kitchen where Jean and his fellow orderly would be at work. But he had pledged his word to be present at Villier's farewell *déjeuner,* and, in addition, he could not think of giving any evidence of the concern which was actually his over the *poilu's* impassioned threat and insinuation, by failing to appear. As the church clock began to announce the hour of mid-day, he stepped from the le Jeune cottage . . . to find Jean directly in front of him, in the roadway.

The soldier paused, and then passed on with face averted, but Daniel thought that he read in his attitude a suggestion of shame over his recent outburst, and he would have hurried after him and spoken a conciliatory word, if Joan had not at that moment leaned from the lower window, and, with

her voice lifted so that both men could hear her clearly, called, "It is such a perfect day, that I should like to take thee this afternoon to my secret hiding place in the ruins of the old chateau, as I have often promised thee that I would sometime do, Monsieur Steele. That is, if thou wouldst care to go with me."

The suggestion pleased Daniel, and he gladly assented, not realizing that behind the invitation lay a woman's pique, and sudden purpose to punish another who, through love, had offended her.

But Jean understood, and he bit his lip angrily as he walked away, head very erect, to complete the errand upon which he had been despatched.

As the American drew near the house which he was about to enter, he came upon a group of little urchins who were milling around Pierre, and teasing him by trying to wrest away his most precious possession — the wooden gun. Tears of rage streaked the child's none-too-clean countenance, and, seeing his friend approaching, he fled to his legs for protection. Daniel effected the rescue without incurring the hostility of the enemy, and, after he had dried Pierre's tears and disengaged himself from the clinging hands, he hastened into the house.

A half dozen officers were already assembled in the room where the *popote* was served, although a

high bed and a piano showed that it had a mixed object in the plan of the house, and the newcomer's arrival was greeted with shouts of welcome and laughter. The reason for the especial hilarity was not clear to him until he turned suddenly, and found the child close to his heels, and regarding him with wistful appeal.

"They tried to take my gun away again," he confided, as he smiled ingratiatingly, and snuggled his hand into Daniel's.

Somewhat amused, and a bit chagrined, as well, the protector attempted to lead him out, but Pierre rebelled vigorously with body and voice, and he would not budge until one hand held a big slice of bread, and the other part of a cake of chocolate, produced by Villier . . . and the street appeared free of the attacking force. Even then it was only Jean's return, dismayed at such *lese majesté,* that sent him scurrying.

"*Déjeuner* is served, Messieurs," announced the orderly, pointedly avoiding Daniel's eye.

"At table, friends," said Villier, and he raised his small glass of *porto,* adding, "*Bon appetit.*"

"To your good health!" responded the others, including Daniel, who would have drunk the toast in water, if he had not been prevented by some one who declared that it was bad luck.

"Were all those children outside, yours, Monsieur?" demanded Lieutenant Villier, beginning the meal with a jest, and when Daniel met his mood by assenting, he cried, "Well done, my American. On behalf of France I thank you."

All laughed, except a young adjutant, whom Daniel had previously found to be of a deeply serious nature. He rejoined with, "That has ceased to be a subject for jest, merely. France is now more sadly in need of repopulating than ever."

"Truly spoken, O philosophical one, but, if I recall correctly, your preachments and practices are as far apart as the poles. How many children did you tell us that you have?" gibed Villier.

"None, I regret to say."

The lieutenant proceeded to call the roll, and although five of the six Frenchmen were married, only one had an heir.

"Your expression seems to ask 'Why,' Monsieur Steele. Perhaps you think, as there are plenty to tell you, that France is a decadent, a dying race. It may be so, although when History writes the story of the last four years I imagine that such will not be her conclusion. No, the trouble is that we, of the upper classes, at least, are too selfish. We love our comfort and luxury too much to imperil it by having offspring."

" Then you should be ashamed of yourselves," answered Daniel, soberly. Again the rest laughed, with the same exception, but the adjutant agreed, " You say well. We *should* be ashamed, and unless France has a change of heart in this respect, she will perish, and be one with Carthage and with Rome. Look at the broods which those *Boche* breed," he went on, passionately. " The little brats fairly get under foot at every side, and fifteen or twenty years from to-day they will be goose-stepping toward France, just as their fathers did, if we do not take a lesson from their book."

" Or unless the proposed League of Nations is effective," supplemented Daniel.

Villier shrugged, expressing the growing disappointment of all his countrymen in the way things were going at Paris. " It is a beautiful dream, but if France is to dream it, she will do well to sleep with a loaded pistol under her pillow pointed toward Germany. By the way," he added, addressing Jean, who had just entered with plates of *hors d'œuvres*— sardines fried in oil, and potato salad, " speaking of pistols, I cannot find that *Boche Lüger* which I took from the German Colonel at St. Mihiel. Do you remember packing it with my luggage, Harent? "

" No, my lieutenant," answered the orderly.

"Well, I may have mislaid it myself, but I should regret losing it, for it is not only the sole souvenir of the great war which I have kept, but a pretty weapon, as well."

"After *déjeuner* I will seek for it, my lieutenant."

"Very well."

The meal leisurely progressed from the *hors d'œuvres* to beef stew, deliciously tender, then to green string beans, to an omelet, and, finally, to a big, open-faced tart of Mirabelle plums; each a separate course as it appeared on the menu that the adjutant *chef du popote* had written out, and decorated with a water-color sketch — which would have been more clever if he had not copied it from *La Vie Parisienne*. And, as one course followed another around the table, always commencing formally with the one to the left of him who had started the preceding on its journey, the light wine, and lighter conversation, flowed on. Daniel partook of none of the former, and for a time remained rather moodily a stranger to the latter, as well.

But an end was put to his somber preoccupation, when Villier suddenly disappeared behind his napkin, to reappear with a watch crystal in one eye, for a monocle, and drawled out a dialogue between Baron Someone, and Count Somebody Else, during which he politely inquired of himself whether he

had wintered at Monte Carlo or at Nice and replied, "Oh, no, my dear Baron, I spent the past winter in Mirabelle, a most delightful village in the Vosges mountains, ye know."

Daniel had to join the others in laughter, for Villier's gaiety was irresistibly infectious. Then he found it difficult to restrain his awakened risibilities, when there commenced a sudden violent discussion over the mechanics of some cannon or other — a subject about which he knew absolutely nothing — and the sérious-minded adjutant, who talked as vehemently with his hands as with his tongue, repeatedly attempted to convey a forkful of beans to his awaiting mouth, only each time to be interrupted with a question, or an antagonistic assertion, and replace them, untouched.

"If this discussion keeps up much longer, he'll be in imminent danger of starving to death," thought Daniel, choking in an effort not to laugh. Fortunately for the adjutant, the subject gravitated to the never-failing topic of conversation at all such meetings — women — and he was saved.

As usual, it was the volatile lieutenant who took the lead, and he seized the occasion when Jean was in the act of changing courses, to demand of Daniel, "How goes the race between you and Harent, for the favor of 'the Maid of Mirabelle,' Mlle.

Joan? I observe that when she is not with one, she is pretty sure to be with the other."

"I was not aware that there was any race," answered the American briefly, and could have cursed himself, for he felt that his face was growing red to the ears.

"Oh ho, I see that my shot told. It is fortunate for me that I leave immediately, for I should hate to choose whether I would act as second for my friend, our American ally, or my orderly and brother Frenchman, or even take sides less spectacularly in this pretty comedy of rustic love."

Daniel sent a hasty glance towards Jean, who stood behind the lieutenant's chair, scowling blackly, and, with a hope of turning the subject wholly into a jest, he said, "If we *were* rivals, I am sure that we should be generous ones. To tell the truth, after what you said to me on the evening of your arrival here, I rather thought that you meant to enter the field also, and make us both retire into the background, my lieutenant."

"I? Oh no. The chase would not be sufficiently interesting; for although Mlle. Joan is estimable, and passing fair, I'm afraid that she lacks the essential element of surprise — she is too sweet and simple for my taste. If I were to play the game of hearts here, it would be with the younger sister,

Suzette. There is a merry young spitfire for you — oh, I know — and as pretty as a picture and capricious as a colt."

Daniel laughed outright. "Suzette is all of that, but she's only a child."

"A child? She tells me that she is over sixteen, and she is therefore just ripe to pick, for a woman is like a cherry — all the more delectable for having a bit of the tang of early springtime in them. I don't like them too mellow. You Americans are funny, but I understand that in the chilly atmosphere of your country the girls develop more slowly than they do here."

"If that is the way you feel, perhaps I am just as well pleased that you leave Mirabelle this afternoon. I'm very fond of my 'little French sister.' But I do not know why you always speak of us Anglo-Saxons as a cold-blooded race. Any one would think, to hear you, that we have no hearts at all."

"Oh, I suppose that you *are* human, under the skin, but, if so, I cannot help thinking that most of you are hypocrites in a way. At least it seems to me that many whom I have met, follow the advice of the English dramatist, Shakespeare, and 'assume a virtue though they have it not.'"

"What do you mean by that?" demanded Daniel, instantly bristling.

"Well, a great many of you pretend to be shocked and disgusted at what they characterize as the immorality of the French, and yet I have noticed that they — I don't mean you, now — are parties to the fall of man, like ourselves, only they pretend to ignore the fact, or, like father Adam, blame it on the woman. Perhaps I am wrongly judging all by a few, which I have found to be a common failing with humanity, but I have seen enough of life to conclude that mankind, except for superficial characteristics, is pretty much alike, the world over.

"What is the use of ignoring the fundamental facts of human nature? We may be too free, in France, but at least we face them fairly; we are honest about our peccadillos. All men are bigamous by nature, anyway."

"No, indeed they are not," contradicted the American, with feeling. "And even if it is true that some of our race are hypocrites, as you say, is theirs not the better course? Admitting that temptation exists, is it not preferable to endeavor to cloak that fact from the common gaze, rather than to flaunt it openly for all to see; especially the young?"

"That is one way of looking at it, of course. But do not forget the time-worn saying that famil-

iarity breeds contempt. Besides, curiosity concerning hidden things is a mighty moving force."

"Granted. But I guess that our conventions are utterly opposed."

"And it is always hard to see the other man's point of view clearly and dispassionately. Racial or individual prejudice holds a cloudy glass before our eyes. However, try not to be too hard on France; we are a hot-blooded race, our traditional religion makes repentance easy and, well, it is the custom of the country.

"But enough of controversy for the present, my American friend, for I leave in an hour. You must visit me in Paris — here's my address . . ." he scribbled it on a piece of paper . . . "and we will renew the battle there, always 'generous rivals' — to quote your own words."

Cigarettes were now alight, and the room grew hotter and more stuffy. The table had been cleared, and fresh glasses set at each place. One of the officers was at the battered piano, singing *"Madelon,"* and accompanying himself with octaves in the upper register, and a monotonous, unvaried chord in the lower, which occasionally harmonized, but generally did not. Daniel writhed inwardly, for, although he was not a musician, he had, in common with most Americans, an innate appreciation of it.

" The piano is pretty badly out of tune," remarked Villier, with a wink at Daniel. " When we arrived, I tried to tune it myself, but as the only implement available was a big monkey wrench, and as Madame was singing one melody in the next room, Jean whistling another in the kitchen, and little Pierre, at my elbow, trying to hum the note I happened to be sounding, it was not altogether a success."

Jean entered with two tall bottles of champagne, and filled the glasses. The singer broke off to resume his place at the table.

" Come, now; a toast," cried the lieutenant. " To Marshal Foch, a worthy *generalissimo* of valiant armies."

They drank it standing. Daniel found himself on his feet, with his glass lifted, but he set it down, untasted, and his act passed unobserved in the cheers.

The hilarity grew apace; other toasts were proposed, and drunk, and it was not long before his continued abstinence began to draw laughing gibes upon him, together with more and more insistent demands that he drink. And, as the headier wine began to make its effect felt, some of the party displayed a little ill-temper at his reiterated smiling refusals, and patient explanations.

Daniel felt himself commencing to grow hot in-

side, and decidedly uncomfortable. His earlier forebodings were being justified, and he realized that he would much better have sent some excuse for failing to accept the invitation. Physical discomfort was added to the mental, for Jean had removed the carafe of water which had been placed on the table, as a concession to him, and his throat and mouth were becoming parched, in the close, hot atmosphere, while the sight of the bubbling liquid made his thirst more acute.

Twice he started to stand up, and began a halting sentence to the effect that he was obliged to depart, and twice boisterous hands forced him back into his chair.

There is some hospitality from which no escape seems possible, and Daniel realized that he was virtually a prisoner in the hands of his friends. It made him half-angry, but he finally yielded to necessity, and settled back to enjoy the increasing merriment, in as far as he could, although the stories which had begun to go around the table, shamed and disgusted him, especially when the owner of the house, and his attractive young wife, were summoned in to drink a health to their departing lodger.

At length Villier glanced at his wrist watch, started, and announced that he must leave at once to finish his preparations for the return to civil life.

He stood up, a little unsteadily, leaned his hand on Daniel's shoulder, and raised his glass, with the words, " To the United States of America — Friend of France for a hundred years, and her best companion in the struggle against her worst enemy."

With a united shout the others arose, pulling Daniel with them, and they looked at him with eager expectancy. The words had stirred him strongly, for patriotism was a passion with him, and for the first time in his life the prohibition against strong wine lay heavy on his heart. He wanted to drink, and drink deep — not for the liquor's sake, but because of the toast. Still, the life-long inhibition proved powerful, and he shook his head. On more than one lip there was a sneer, which goaded him into saying, " I thank you, but this time I stand for America. It is like a toast to me, and so I should not join in drinking it."

The rest drained their glasses, and Jean promptly refilled them.

Then Villier spoke again. " I must go, but there is one more — perhaps the last that I shall ever drink in uniform. Messieurs — to France! "

Every eye was turned on Daniel. The single word had seemed to cause his oft-tried will to snap, like a frayed strand. He vaguely realized that if he waited even an instant, his conscience would re-

assert itself and save him — and he knew that he *wanted* to yield, just once.

"I'll drink *that*," he cried, raising his glass high.

There was a shout of approbation, and Villier clapped him on the back. The glasses flashed. "'Bottoms up,' as our American friends say," called the lieutenant. Daniel placed his to his lips, and shut his eyes and deafened his ears to the command of his true self. He drank. The effervescing wine strangled him; it seemed to fill his whole head and nose, tears came to his eyes, and he sneezed and sputtered, while the others burst into loud merriment.

"Look, he drank nearly a teaspoonful," exclaimed Villier, as he pointed to the glass which Daniel hastily set down. "Well done, friend. There is hope for thee, yet. I go, but I must bid thee adieu in the real French fashion." He suddenly drew the American to him by both shoulders, and kissed him first on one cheek, then on the other.

The lieutenant was immediately surrounded by his comrades, and under cover of the flow of words, Daniel slipped from the room, filled with sudden shame.

CHAPTER XVII

AFTERNOON

THE sun was beginning to sink behind Mirabelle, and Daniel and Joan walked on soft purple shadows until they reached the bridge of gray stone over the Moselle, but then the fields before them were flooded with golden light, rich and warm, and bright with new green; and every red-brown rock and tree on the side of the steep hill which they were to climb, stood forth in sharp relief. The young grass was soft and yielding under their feet, as they struck obliquely across the meadow land, and it was dotted with tiny white daisies, blood-red poppies half unfolded, and blue corn-flowers. In spots, patches of all three came together so symmetrically that the man imagined Nature had purposely decorated the valiant fields with the victorious *tricolore* of France. Here and there Joan paused to peek under a tuft of tall grass, or a turned-up hummock of damp earth, and point out, with exclamations of delight, tiny clumps of purple or white violets, in bashful hiding.

Behind them, the church bells began to chime for Vespers, and their melodious sound, floating through the still air, carried the man's mind instinctively back home to the Sabbath quiet of his native village, the small gray meeting-house, filled with its silent worshippers — the hatted men all on one side, and the gentle gray-appareled womenfolk on the other.

The air was soft and warm — unusually so for early spring in the Vosges — and by the time the two had toiled up the steep and narrow path, which turned abruptly many times before it arrived at the top of the hill, Daniel was aglow and breathing fast, for during the climb he had lent his hand to the girl, who had accepted it, although by no means in need of any assistance.

Then the cool dark shade of the ancient trees enfolded them, and shut from sight the world of men below.

Now Joan took the lead, and made her way over moss-covered boulders, which Nature had placed there, and hewn stones, which men had erected for a habitation and other men had overthrown in their wrath, until they came to the spot which she had christened her own. Part of a fallen wall, thick with ivy, protected it from the wind, which here had a hint of winter chill in it; a mossy bank made a natural seat; the foliage of two towering trees

formed a canopy overhead — dark green interwoven with threads of golden sunshine; while vistas through the wood disclosed distant glimpses of the sunlit valley below, with the Moselle winding and glinting through it.

They had conversed but little during the walk thither, for the voices of awakening Nature had filled their ears. And now the peace and beauty of the place was sufficient to keep them silent. The girl seated herself, with a faint sigh, leaned forward and rested her chin in one cupped palm. Daniel dropped at her feet, momentarily closing his eyes in complete relaxation. For the first time, he realized how exceedingly weary he really was; physically weary from the unceasing labor in which he had sought forgetfulness, to find it only occasionally; mentally weary of struggling against the thing which had taken possession of him. Even now the questionings of his heart would not be silenced.

Faith was far away; so very far away that his memory of her had become almost vague, like that of a pleasant dream. Of course he was fond of her, loved her still, there was not the faintest doubt of this in his heart, but he decided that, after all, his affection was that of a brother for a sister. Had it really been anything else? Suddenly he found him-

self ardently wishing that he had waited to hear, from her own lips, the word which had bound him to her, that he might have held her close in his arms as lover, if only for a moment. "Then," he whispered to himself, "I might have had another, and a stronger memory to carry with me always, and it might suffice to . . ." He did not finish the thought.

Daniel opened his eyes, and looked up at Joan. Her gaze was far off on the sunlit plain, and it was dreamy and tempting. Her slightly parted lips, red with youth, and the beautiful color in her cheeks were both tempting, too. His heart leaped at the sight, as it had many times before. There was no need for him to try to analyze his feelings for *her*. He knew that he loved her, and at last he faced the undeniable fact squarely.

His arms yearned to take her. She was there, close beside him, lovely of form and face; spiritually congenial; mentally alert, even though her formal education had been a limited one; physically pulsing with life; altogether desirable. And she cared for him. He knew it beyond doubt, and he felt that he might easily, if he willed to do so, turn her simple affection into the broader, deeper channel of love. He might at that moment claim her as his own, if he would.

The thought staggered him. A choice upon which would depend the course of two lives — perhaps three — was within his grasp to make or to relinquish. He vaguely realized the dangers which might attend the choice, if he were to follow the simple dictates of his heart; she might not be happy in America, and he could not remain in France; she was not of his people, not of his kind. The visions, first of Faith, to whom he had plighted his word, and then of Jean, to whom he had pledged his friendship, passed before his mind's eye. "Perhaps Joan loves him," he thought, with a jealous pang, "but even if she does, I *know* that I can win her for myself. It might not be fair, but what does that count compared with love? And I love her." It was the primal nature, male arrayed against male for the possession of a mate, who should later be mastered, that now spoke within him.

The inner struggle had made his whole body rigid, and caused his strong face, now lean and worn, to set in severe lines.

Joan's soft voice broke into his thoughts. "Thou art very weary, then, Daniel? Here, lean against my knees, and I will rub thy forehead." She drew him against her, and began to run her fingers slowly through his damp, tangled hair. The sensation was one of infinite caress. Her other hand lay at her

side, and he reached back and clasped it, nor did she make any effort to withdraw it.

"Thou must rest, for it is very peaceful and quiet here, while to-morrow the hard work begins again. Listen!" A lark had commenced a madly thrilling melody, high in the air above them. They could not see the bird, but its liquid notes filled the wood, and seemed to set the new leaves quivering with delight.

"It is a love song, I think," whispered the girl, "for it is now the mating season." Daniel turned his head, and looked up at her again. There was an expression in her dark eyes that was unmistakable, and, not knowing that it had been called into being by thoughts of another, it stirred him deeply. She glanced down and met his look with a tender smile, then abruptly bent over, and gave his forehead a light kiss.

The kiss was the electric spark which started the charged dynamo of his heart into swift action. He sprang up, drawing her with him, and cried, "Don't, don't do that, Joan, unless . . . "

"But why?" she asked, a little frightened by the look on his set face. "Truly, I meant no harm. Was it wrong, Monsieur? Are we not dear pals — like a brother and sister to one another?"

"No, we are not pals. I do not want to play at

being comrades any longer. Don't you know that I love you, Joan — love you with all that is in me, want you to be my wife?" He drew her passionately to him in a powerful embrace and kissed her cheek and her lips again and again, until, panting and disheveled, she succeeded in twisting free and pushing him away to the full length of her own strong arms. Her eyes were very wide, and held an expression half troubled, half terrified.

"Monsieur Steele, what is it that you are saying? You do not love me like that. You cannot."

"Why can I not? I do. I want you, Joan."

He stepped towards her again, but she eluded him. "No, no. I will not have it so, Monsieur. I have been so happy in our dear friendship — you have meant so much to me since Henri went, and . . . Oh, I do not want to hear you say those words. Besides, there is . . . there is the girl whose photograph you carry with you always. Is she not really the one whom you love? A man does not carry a picture next his heart, unless . . . " She stopped, surprised to find herself mechanically repeating the accusation at which she had herself scoffed that morning.

"Who says so?" demanded Daniel, hotly.

"Monsieur Jean."

"He lies." The words sprang from Daniel's

lips, spoken not by himself, but the power which had seized upon him, and although the shock of hearing himself utter them brought to his subconscious mind the story of Peter in the judgment hall, he was past caring. "Is it then that you love him?" he cried passionately.

"I . . . I do not know. I cannot tell you," answered the girl. Suddenly she covered her face with both hands to hide the blushes, then turned, and ran as fast as she could in her wooden shoes, out of sight among the trees. Daniel took one step in pursuit, stopped, and stood rigid, dazed at the suddenness of her flight, and the realization that his dream was ended.

There was the sound of a branch snapping beneath her feet, and of a partial stumble, and again he started forward with renewed intention to give chase, to overtake her and hold her close once more, to kiss her, and make her yield her love to him. His senses were in such a turmoil of mad desire as he had never before even conceived of. But something — a brief gleam of the clear, calm light of reason breaking through the lurid clouds of passion — prevented him. Slowly his brain cleared, and he faced the knowledge that he had lost — or been saved. Then came remorse, shame.

He dropped on the bank where Joan had sat, and

buried his head in his hands. It was aching dully, and there was another ache in his heart.

Perhaps his first coherent thought was that he had been a fool, a blind, egotistical fool to have believed that the girl was his for the asking, rather than another's. He could not even hug to his breast the slight comfort that he was not solely to blame for his obsession. For he knew that Joan had never once encouraged him in it, and that he had himself paved the way for her natural display of frank and sisterly affection, He had misled her, by both his words and behavior. The thought brought self-reproach, keen and humiliating. Disjointed sentences out of the past drifted into his mind, like bits of flotsam on a troubled sea; the simple words of the girl at home, "You will be true, true to thy faith?" and his reply; Lieutenant Villier's jest about the need which he would have to keep a tight check-rein on his heart if ever he met a *real* French girl; the familiar quotation "as true as steel," which he had once regarded in the light of a personal motto.

Daniel could not, and did not, try to deny that he had actually loved Joan, or that he still loved her, but he now saw the truth clearly, and knew that this love was in the main a purely primitive physical instinct, with little that was sacrificial and ennobling about it. In contrast to it he remembered, with a

bitter pang, his feelings toward Faith on that night, which seemed ages past, — how he had so longed to guard and protect her. And with the recollection came the strange realization that he still felt toward Faith just as he had on that long ago evening.

"Is it true, then, as Villier declared, that all men are polygamous by nature?" he demanded of himself. "Can a man truly love two women at the same time, although, perhaps, in different ways?" Daniel had, for a long time, felt in his heart that he possessed a deeper conception of life, and that his knowledge was broader, and his judgement therefore more lenient, than those of most of the strict sect to which he belonged. Now his eyes had been opened by the great teacher — Experience — and he realized how little he had actually known of human temptation, and human weakness. It made him feel strangely helpless — like a leaf which had been torn loose from its familiar place, and made the plaything of the passionate winds. "And I used to think that I had my full share of self-control and will power," he thought, disgustedly, and then found himself saying aloud, "What am I, that I should condemn *thee?*" for he felt as though there were present with him, in spirit, all the others of all the ages, who had been similarly tempted, and yielded to their temptation.

A revulsion came over him, and brought a new and stronger idea. In thus seeking an explanation for his behavior he was merely condoning it; he was like a child who, having stumbled, lay where he had fallen, weeping and pitying himself, instead of getting up. Suppose it were true that man could love and desire more than one woman, was that not all the more reason for the establishment of an ideal of steadfast faith toward one, if he were to achieve a destiny higher than the beasts'? And if some were by nature more strongly subject to temptation than others, as his foster-father had hinted, was it not incumbent upon them to face that fact fairly, and struggle against that temptation all the more stubbornly? He had failed, but he realized that, although one failure is a sign of weakness, it may be made a source of strength; for forewarned *is* forearmed. He could almost feel the fibers of his moral nature — which had been loosened by the fingers of the tempter within during many weeks, and that afternoon torn to shreds — knitting together again, stronger than before, like a rope which has been broken and spliced.

Yes, he *knew* that he was stronger for his experience. But what would the Elder, whose life had been lived throughout within the letter and the spirit of the law, and what would his pure-in-heart wife

say, if they should ever know the manner of thing that had befallen him? What would Faith, herself, think?

Joan was not for him, could never be his, and although he cared for her no less than before, he had at last conquered desire; but at home the other girl was awaiting his return, and loving him steadfastly — never for a moment did he doubt that. If he confessed the past to her, the comfort of *that* love might also be taken away, and, on the moment, it seemed more desirable than ever it had before. Like a light within a quiet haven, as he had once characterized it, her affection seemed to shine through the present darkness, beckoning, beckoning. And he had madly built a barrier against himself across the harbor's entrance.

"I might go back and claim her, as though this afternoon had never happened," he thought. "But pray God that I am man enough now not to do that. No, I shall go back, after my work here is finished, but it will be to tell her the truth, and then she will know what manner of man I have been at heart, and will turn away from me. She could do nothing else, and keep her self-respect, trained as she has been. Villier would say that I am a fool, but at least I am not going to be a coward.

"But how can I now go back to Mirabelle to live?"

He paused, and then with set jaw and clenched hands, added aloud, "Yes, I will do that, too, if Joan will forgive me. I'll learn to live up to her belief in me, and become the real pal which I have pretended to be."

With new resolution and a deeper calm bred of it, Daniel arose. Heavy shadows enclosed him, as though nature were reflecting the mood which had been his, and, as he started down the hillside toward Mirabelle, the prophecy of old Barbette re-echoed in his mind, and he found himself laughing aloud, bitterly. "The old witch was right, after all," he said.

But he did not yet know how fully right she had been!

CHAPTER XVIII

EVENING

April weather is as subject to moods in North-eastern France as it is in New England, and, before Daniel's struggle with self was ended, swiftly gathered clouds had hastened the long twilight into a darkness almost as black as the pit, within the woods. The rising wind sighed in minor cadences through the restless branches overhead, and a bird, that had been unduly hurried to its nest, repeated a plaintive call. The man had never known real fear, but the spirit of the place, with its dead ruins, began to play upon his already overwrought nerves, and they quivered in unison with nature. A spatter of cold rain, from a passing shower, struck upon his face and caused him to start so sharply that he laughed aloud at himself. Although his voice rang hollow and unnatural on his ears, the sound of it braced him; but he was glad to find himself at last free from the sobbing forest, and at the top of the

narrow path down the hillside. He had to descend it cautiously, for the way was steep and tortuous, but he instinctively clung close to the natural bank, or man-built wall on the inner side, and his mind was free to continue the reflections to which it was the prey. Over and over he re-acted, in memory, the events of the afternoon, and registered the thoughts which had been his during them, and afterwards when he was alone, until his heart cried out in rebellion, "Am I not facing a punishment bitter enough, without being tormented like this?"

Daniel was thankful to reach the foot of the hill and the village street, and since it was now far too dark for him to take the short cut across the fields, he turned down the road, and was soon where the lights from peaceful homes shone on either side of him. His mind could not but reflect a little of the cheerfulness which they sent forth, and he walked on, with brisker step and lifted head, until he came opposite a corner café, from within which sounded the merry clink of glasses, and many soldier voices in boisterous song and laughter.

"Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy," his mind quoted. "It is the custom of the country; they see no wrong in it, and, therefore, they are not sinning — but truly their ways are not like ours."

One voice, raised for a moment above the rest,

struck on his ears and caused him to stop instinctively. It had sounded a little like that of Jean, although he realized the next instant that it was probably not his, but the old jealousy flared for a moment in his heart, and then turned to ashes. "That is all over now," he whispered. "Jean was my friend, and he will be again. Besides, he deserves her; I never did."

Calmer, now that his renunciation was complete, he turned into the road which led past the little station, through the fields, and across the river to Mirabelle.

The wind had died down and the brief shower passed, as abruptly as they had come up, but the darkness was so intense that he could keep to his pathway only by looking upward, and guiding his course by the scarcely discernible forms of the trees that lined the road at intervals on either side.

The noise of the rushing river grew louder, and at length his eye caught a vague reflection from it, for, while any light remains at all, water seems to catch, and intensify it. He recognized the dim outlines of the canal, barely showing for a few feet, and then vanishing utterly, and walked more cautiously, for he knew that the sides of the roadway dropped precipitously down to the tow-path on either side of the little bridge, with no protecting rail.

Suddenly he stopped altogether. The night air had seemed to bring a whisper of voices from below him, and not far distant — one a man's, the other a woman's. For an instant he stood immovable; then, concluding that it was merely the tryst of two village lovers, he was about to move on, when the whispering was augmented by the unmistakable sound of a scuffle, and then, clear and high, a frightened voice crying, "No, no, I cannot, I will not. Let me go, let me go home." Almost instantly a frightened scream pierced the still air, and another, and another.

Daniel's heart stopped dead, and then began to pound furiously. For he felt that the voice was, beyond the possibility of a doubt, one that he knew and had learned to love — the voice of Joan!

With an inarticulate shout, he plunged down the steep bank, scrambling and sliding; picked himself up, and raced forward, mad with rage and fear. Almost before he knew it, he had charged headlong against the form of a man, and grappled with him; and at the same instant he was conscious that another figure had fled past him, sobbing uncontrolledly. Her skirts brushed his legs, and, even in his rage, he could feel an overwhelming sense of relief, for he had saved her, and so in part expiated his fault. Then that feeling vanished, swallowed up in

one burning, red desire to punish the man, whoever he might be.

His powerful hands felt their way upward from the arms upon which they had fastened themselves, to the man's throat. They closed upon it, tighter, tighter. The other — still unseen — was struggling furiously, tearing at those gripping fingers, and beating Daniel on the face and body. But he held on, grimly, and strengthened the choking pressure. The blows meant nothing to him; his own muscular action became almost automatic, and his brain, although singularly active, did not register present impressions, but was flooded with disjointed thoughts out of the past. Now it repeated old Barbette's words, "Beware lest you also dip your hands in blood;" now the words of the sixth commandment, "Thou shalt not kill." Daniel laughed aloud, and tightened his grip.

The other's hands had ceased to strike at him. He had sunk to his knees.

Then the American's eyes were filled with the light of a dazzling flash, which disclosed the face of his opponent; his chest received a crushing, burning blow. He had been shot! The realization astonished him, more than anything else, but, although a tearing ache began in his breast, he did not relinquish the grip on the other's throat.

Then came a crashing blow against his temple, a myriad of flashing lights, and oblivion.

* * * * * * * *

There were calls, and shouted inquiries in the darkness that masked the road to Mirabelle, for the fete day was ending, and many soldiers were returning from one village to the other. There were sounds of running feet on the hard roadway, and pocket-lights began to flash and *briquets* to flare, wavering from side to side, like eyes searching in the night. Then came a cry from below the road by the edge of the canal, and the lights converged, and formed a ring there.

The combined radiance threw a circular white patch on the trampled soil and young grass. In the center of it lay the motionless form of a young man. His forehead was horribly bruised, and bleeding from a jagged gash, and the left breast of his dark uniform showed a burned patch, and an ugly hole. Beside the silent figure knelt another man, dressed in the uniform of a soldier of France. There was a look of horror on his young face, as he turned it up to the searching light.

"It's the American." "Is he dead?" "Who did it?" "Who was the first one here?" "Not I." "Nor I." The short, excited sentences fell from many lips.

"What's the matter? What's wrong here? I heard a shot. *Bon Dieu!*" Another man, clad in a lieutenant's uniform, arrived on the run, and pushed his way through the circle of forms. He knelt beside the prostrate figure, and laid his hand over the heart; then looked blackly around the ring of frightened faces, and uttered a curt command. "Do not allow any one to leave this place until I give permission. Sergeant Bouvet, see that my order is obeyed.

"Now then, who was the first to reach this spot after the shot?"

No one answered.

"Come, answer me, men. Somebody must have been first."

"I think that I was the first to reach it, with a light, my lieutenant," responded the sergeant. "At least, I saw none here as I was running up, although I am quite sure that I heard others running also — two at least — and I thought that one was a woman, for there was a sound like crying."

"Of course. One would naturally assume as much. But enough of conjecture. What did you *see*, when you got here with your flash-light?"

"I saw the American just as he is lying now, and kneeling beside him . . . Jean Harent."

"Ha! Were you, then, the first to arrive? Why did you not answer me, Harent?" demanded the officer, sharply.

"I . . . I was dazed, I think, my lieutenant," was Jean's halting reply. "Perhaps I was the first to arrive. I do not know. It was all dark."

"Well, what did *you* see, and hear?"

"I saw nothing, my lieutenant. It was utterly dark, as I have said. But I, too, heard the sound of fleeing feet."

"And a woman's voice?"

There was no answer. The officer repeated his question, angrily, and augmented it with the words, "Who was that woman, Harent? Your silence can only be taken to mean that you heard, and recognized the voice."

"No, my lieutenant; at least, I cannot say."

"Cannot, or will not?"

Again the *poilu* failed to respond.

"Two of you pick up the American, and carry him as gently as you can to the house of the Doctor Piquet." The sergeant selected two of the number, and they started slowly up the path with their heavy burden.

"Now then, Bouvet, search this man. He knows more about this than he has told us."

"There is no weapon on him, my lieutenant,"

announced the sergeant, after he had run his hands over Jean's clothing.

" Naturally. Any one would have thrown it away, and the canal is near — and deep. But some of you commence to look around. There is a possibility that . . . "

The others scattered to the search, holding their lights close to the ground, and, almost immediately, one cried, " I have found it! I have found it! Look, my lieutenant, there is a pistol caught in the grass close to the water's edge."

The officer turned, and hastened to the spot indicated by the searcher, and, holding on to one of his hands for support, slid down the bank and picked up the weapon. The soldier helped him back to the path, and the silent circle re-formed. The lieutenant started, as the light shone full upon the pistol, and then, holding it forward under Jean's silent gaze, demanded, " Did you ever see this pistol before, Harent? "

The *poilu's* eyes turned toward him with mute anguish.

" Yes, my lieutenant, I think so."

" Ah, so I thought. Is it then the German *Lüger*, concerning the disappearance of which Lieutenant Villier was speaking to you at *déjeuner* this noon? "

" Yes, my lieutenant."

"You were his orderly, and had access to his room, is it not so?"

There was no reply this time.

"You know the American, of course, know him well?"

"Yes, he was my friend."

"They had quarreled about that village girl, Joan le Jeune. At least it has been *said* that this very morning Harent threatened to kill him, if he did not keep away from her," volunteered one; and another's tongue was suddenly loosened to supplement this statement with, "And the American Monsieur and the girl started out walking together this afternoon, my lieutenant. I saw them."

"Enough. Jean Harent, you are under arrest. Bouvet, appoint two of these men to guard him, and make a note of the names of all who have been here. Are either of you armed?" he inquired of the pair, who, at a word from the sergeant, had ranged themselves on either side of Jean. They shook their heads.

"Very well, I will give one of you this pistol, and see to it well that you return it to me. But first, observe. There is one exploded cartridge, and one bullet to be accounted for."

He drew the clip of cartridges out, and held it under the piercing eye of one of the flash-lights.

The rest crowded close. All of the cartridges, save one, still showed their ugly black bullets. The lieutenant sniffed at it, and nodded. "It has been exploded recently; the smell of burned powder is still strong."

He snapped the clip back into its chamber, and passed the weapon over. "If you have occasion to shoot, shoot straight," was his curt command. "Forward, march!"

The silent company started forward in the wake of the one which had preceded them towards Mirabelle.

CHAPTER XIX

NIGHT

WITHIN the little living-room of the cottage, everything was apparently as cosy as usual, but there was a spreading spirit of restlessness in the air. Joan blamed herself for it; she knew that it had had its inception within her own heart. The girl was thoroughly miserable. The day, which had begun so beautiful and so auspicious, had ended with everything gone wrong, and she could not pretend that the fault was not largely her own.

She had inexcusably played with Jean's honest love until he had rebelled, and, in anger, left her — as any man might have done. Then, as though perversely to punish him for her own mistake, she had flauntingly extended an invitation to Daniel, and had finished by hurting him, although less intentionally. "What a little fool I have been," she said to herself. "Truly, I do not deserve the love of either of them, and perhaps I have lost both." The idea frightened her. It was not the image of

the American which came to her mind with the thought. He had, at last, declared his love as passionately as any woman might have desired, and it had left her heart merely troubled, not aroused. Her eyes had been opened; she had come to full realization that what she held for him was deep affection, not love.

But Jean. . . .

Joan's perturbed state of mind had somehow seemed to infect the whole family, only the stolid grandam remaining unmoved. Her father and mother had gone to a neighbor's, after telling her pointedly that her fidgetings were insufferable; she had spoken sharply to Suzette, who had come in late for dinner, and the girl had astonished her by bursting into tears, and rushing off to her room, where she still remained — "sulking," Joan characterized it.

"Perhaps if I take a little walk in the darkness and the cool night air, I shall feel better," she thought. "One can decide everything more calmly underneath the calm stars, and to-night I have many heavy problems, whereas this morning I thought that I had none." Automatically, she took her shawl from its nail behind the door, while her thoughts continued their troublesome course, "It is very strange that Monsieur Steele has not yet re-

turned. Perhaps he is angry, or thinks that I am, though truly I am not. If he should leave us I should blame myself, and all the rest would blame me, for they love him dearly."

She told the old grandmother that she would be gone only a few moments, to get a breath of fresh air, and then stepped into the dark entry . . . almost into the groping arms of old Barbette, who was blindly searching for the doorway. The light, which shone out from the room, fell on the crippled form, and showed Joan that the wizened face was working strangely.

"What is it? Has something happened to frighten you, Madame?" she asked, herself a little frightened at the sudden apparition.

"Aye, aye. All the world is in trouble, and Mirabelle is the center of it, to-night. I came as quickly as my stick would bear me . . . " The girl gave an involuntary start, for the old hag truly looked like a witch in one of her childhood's story books, but Barbette tapped the pavement with the cane upon which she was leaning heavily, and continued. "You have not yet heard, then, Mlle. Joan?"

"Heard? No, I have heard nothing. What is there to hear?"

The old hag chuckled. There was no mirth in the sound, but it held a certain satisfaction. "No, no,

of course you have not yet heard, but old Barbette has heard, for there are voices which bear tales much faster than do human tongues, and they speak to her. Where, think you, is the American Monsieur?" she demanded, with startling abruptness.

"I . . . I do not know. He has not yet returned."

"Aye, he *has* returned to Mirabelle, 'though not to *your* house. He lies at the house of the soldier doctor."

"'The house of the doctor?' . . . 'Lies?'"

"Yes, yes, for, but a half-hour ago, one murderously assaulted him beside the canal, and now his spirit is hovering in the valley of the shadows, which divides the land of living men, from that of the dead. Aye, he is in the shadows, as old Barbette prophesied."

"Daniel! Wounded . . . dying? Oh, no, no, no! *Bon Dieu,* it cannot be true!" Horror swept over Joan as a flood; her thoughts were like drowning things, groping blindly in the turmoil of many waters, which seemed to sound in her ears.

"You doubt the word of old Barbette, eh? Then wait, you shall hear the same from many other lips, soon enough."

"No, it is not that I doubt your word, but . . . oh, it is too awful to believe." Her heart was

leaden, but uncertainty was worse than the answer which she sought, and feared to hear, and she barely whispered, "Who . . . who did it? Do they know?"

There was the sound of a faltering step on the stairs above, but Joan's straining ears did not catch it.

"It is said that the would-be murderer was another friend of Mlle. Joan le Jeune . . . the young *poilu* whom men call Jean."

"No, no! O merciful God in heaven save us from that!" cried the girl, as she turned and flung herself, arms upraised, against the entry wall, and pressed her forehead so sharply on it that the rough plaster bit into her flesh. There was relief in the pain. "It could not be," she moaned.

"And why could it not have been, Mademoiselle?" mumbled the woman, maliciously. "Men are kin to the beasts, and since time was, have fought for a soft caress from the female—especially if she leads them on, and makes them jealous. Old Barbette knows; aye, she knows."

There was a stumbling rush of feet down the dark stairway, and Suzette, her face as white as a ghost's within its light golden frame of unbound hair, fairly threw herself on the old woman, crying fiercely, "Go away, thou witch. It is all a wicked

lie that thou art telling my sister, because thou lovest to torture people."

"A lie, is it, my little spit-fire? We shall see, we shall see. But remember that old Barbette is the American's friend, and perhaps her chance has come to help him now; aye, perhaps she can help to pluck him out of the deep shadows, and send him home to her who waits for him so patiently, so patiently." Still muttering, she hobbled away, unnoticed, for Suzette's arms were tight around the tense body of her sister, and she was whispering words of tenderness, of pity, and of hope to her, while the burning tears, unseen, streamed down her own face.

"Thou dost not believe what the old witch has said. Say that thou dost not, my dear Joan."

"But surely she would not have come to tell me such terrible things, if they were not true; even queer old Barbette could not do such a thing as that," the other moaned. "And my heart has been so heavy, to-night. It is as though I had had a premonition."

"Oh, Joan! But even if our dear Monsieur is . . . is hurt, surely it was not Jean, whom thou lovest, who did it. Surely thou dost not believe *that*."

"I do not know; how can I tell? O, holy Mary,

was there ever a girl so wretched as is Joan le Jeune to-night?"

"Joan, I will not have thee talk thus. Why, thou art quivering all over. Why dost thou not weep? See, I am crying."

Suzette forced the other to turn away from the wall to which she clung, and gathered her close in her strong, young arms.

"I *know* that it is not true . . . about Jean. Tell me that thou, too, believest, my sister."

"Yes, I *do* believe. Thou hast made me, I do not know why. It must, it will come out all right. Oh, I am ashamed that I should have doubted, while thou — whom I thought but a child, and less strong in faith than I . . . Oh, I cannot understand, but I thank thee, my little sister."

The words broke the last barrier to Suzette's emotions and she began to weep passionately against Joan's comforting shoulder, and to utter short muffled wails under her breath, as though they came from her heart, rather than her lips.

There was a new sound, that of other broken wailing and of stumbling feet in the darkness out-of-doors. Three little forms groped their faltering way into the entry, threw themselves upon Joan, and clung close to her skirts.

They half led, half carried the children inside,

where, to the accompaniment of Pierre's terrified sobbing, Marie and Georgette finally succeeded in making it known that they had been awakened by the sound of excited voices, talking in the room off the chamber where they had been slumbering, and, listening, they had learned that somebody had put their dear brother in prison. With but one idea — to bring their grief and terror to Joan — they had stolen away, unobserved, and, clad in their long nightgowns, had stumbled through the darkness filled with fearful shapes, to seek her.

"There, there, don't cry so, everything is going to be all right soon," she crooned, with her lips buried in Pierre's tumbled hair. "It is all a great mistake. Thy Jean will soon be free again."

"She says that it is all a great mistake, and that Jean will soon be free," repeated the eldest, as she clung tightly to Joan's neck. "Now I am not so frightened, but, oh, canst thou not get him out of that awful prison place to-night, my Joan?"

"I cannot promise that; we shall see. But now you must all go back home before you take cold, and Suzette shall accompany you, and sleep with you to-night. Then you will not be afraid, is it not so, my precious ones?"

"But why wilt *thou* not come, instead, Joan?" beseeched Pierre, as he began to weep afresh.

"Thou canst take better care of me than any one else."

New anguish wrung her heart at his trusting words, and she murmured, brokenly, "I shall take care of thee always, my little one."

"Because thou art going to marry Jean, and take us to live with thee?"

There was no longer hesitation, either in her heart or her words, as she answered, "Yes, yes, I shall surely marry Jean, and thou wilt live with me — all of you. But your Joan cannot come to-night. There are many other things for her to do. Come, kiss me, sweets, and go home with Suzette, like good children. Everything is going to be all right, soon."

They departed, reluctantly, Pierre borne in Suzette's arms, and Joan at last stepped forth under the calm, everlasting stars, but it was not to seek solace in the night.

Her hurrying feet carried her first to the house which was occupied by the surgeon for the battery, a young man who had been hastily summoned from his half-completed studies at the University in Paris, to complete his learning as he labored on the battlefield.

A light burned in one of the downstairs rooms. Without pausing to knock, so filled with other

thoughts was her mind, she opened the door and entered.

The doctor and adjutant were seated, smoking. They did not even rise as she entered so unceremoniously, but merely regarded her with looks of astonishment, for her pale face with its large, shadowed eyes, formed a striking picture of grief and loveliness.

"It is about the American, Messieurs," she began, breathlessly. "He lives with us — I am Joan, Joan le Jeune — and it is said that he has been . . . been hurt."

The doctor stood up. "Hurt? Well, one would be safe in saying that, Mademoiselle. He had a bullet through his breast which either touched, or barely missed, the heart, and a bad concussion of the brain from a frightful blow on his temple."

"You mean . . . you mean that he is going to . . . to die?"

"The former injury alone is enough to kill him, Mademoiselle. And the two together . . ." he shrugged his slender shoulders. "Still, I do not mean to frighten you. Of course he *may* live, although I am afraid . . ."

"Where is he now?" she barely whispered, after a moment of poignant silence.

The doctor nodded towards the adjoining room,

the door to which was open, and, by the dim light that entered it from the one in which she was standing, Joan saw a still, silent form lying on the bed, with a sister from the convent sitting beside it, just as motionless and as silent.

"Can he not be carried to his own room, in our home, Monsieur? I . . . I am sure that he would prefer it, and we can help the good sisters in nursing him. Oh, Monsieur, I will not leave him day or night; I would do anything in the world to save him."

The surgeon smiled, dryly. "I doubt whether he has any preference, at present. But, since there is no hospital near by to which he can be carried, I do not see any reason why he should not go to your house, as well as remain here. Besides, I have a personal interest in that bed," he nodded toward the other room again, and Joan shrank at his apparent callousness; yet, in fact, the young physician was quite as willing to sacrifice his rest, and everything else, as any of his brothers-in-service.

"I may as well tell you, frankly, Mademoiselle, that my personal opinion is that he cannot live — a few days at the most, if it proves that the heart has been nicked, but I do not want you to think that, in consequence, we shall not do everything possible to save his life. The Commandant has already des-

patched a telegram to the headquarters of his Society, and to-morrow, without doubt, an American physician will be here as well."

"If he can be moved without danger, it is my wish," she answered, with a calmness which surprised the two men. The doctor glanced at the adjutant with slightly lifted eyebrows, but he answered, politely, "I will have my orderlies do so at once."

"Would you . . . would you be so kind as to wait for a few moments . . . until I return? There is another thing that I have to do; it will take but a very little while, and then I will come back, and accompany them."

He bowed his acquiescence.

"I thank you, Monsieur." Joan turned, swayed a little, and placed her hand for support on the side of the door, but as the doctor started forward, she shook her head with a faint smile, and walked steadily outside, alone.

Through the familiar darkness she moved unhesitatingly until she came before the church, whose squat steeple blotted out a triangular patch of stars. To the left of the black entrance the barred light from a square window shone into the night; she gave it one shuddering glance, and then, regardless of the sentry who, with bayoneted gun, slowly

paced before it, knelt upon the stone steps of the church. The soldier paused, peered at her curiously for an instant, and then continued his leisurely pacing.

Joan bent her head in a whispered *Ave Maria,* and then lifted her eyes to the begemmed black dome of nature's great temple. Her whole soul became a prayer. The petition was not formed in words, but she felt that He who hears before we ask, and is ever more ready to give, than we to receive, understood. Strengthened, comforted, she finally arose, and turned toward the sentry, who halted, and barred her advance with his gun.

"May I . . . may I speak one word to Monsieur Harent? Surely it can do no harm, Monsieur," she pleaded softly.

"I regret, but it is impossible, Mademoiselle. The orders of the Commandant prohibit it."

"But if I were to obtain permission from the Commandant?"

"Ah, that would, of course, be a different matter. But I think that he has now retired, and so could not listen to you until morning."

Joan bowed her head, and turned away with a heavy heart. As she reached the street she turned for one backward glance. There was a new shadow in the little square of light upon the ground. Be-

hind the two bars appeared the dark outline of a head. The sentry had resumed his walk, and his back was turned toward her.

Suddenly, Joan's sweet voice came full and clear through the darkness. "Jean, I know that thou art not guilty; that somehow thou wilt be freed. And Jean . . . " there was the barest break in the sentence, "I love thee."

The sentry wheeled angrily, and took one quick step forward. Then he laughed, for he was French.

But within the cramped, bare room, a heart was throbbing with a great happiness, and although the body of Jean Harent remained in prison, it seemed to him as though his soul had been lifted to Paradise.

CHAPTER XX

"THE MAID"

"FAITH!"

For the hundredth time, it seemed to Joan, the cry rang sharply out from the incoherent ravings of Daniel's delirium; for the hundredth time the man tried to struggle up, with outstretched arms.

Sometimes other disjointed words, and panted sentences, were distinguishable — words of love and pleading, words of renunciation and remorse, repeated over and over. Few of them were intelligible to Joan, but the thought finally came to her that perhaps he might be trying to speak some message to the girl whose photograph he carried; something that she would want to know, if Daniel . . . she would not finish the sentence even in her own mind.

She slipped from the chamber, which she had left scarcely for a moment during the thirty-six hours that had elapsed since the desperately wounded man had been brought to lie in his own bed, and, shortly

afterwards, returned with her little French-English dictionary. One by one she spelled out the oft recurring words, and, after much laborious searching, found them in the book. It was as though she were deciphering a coded message in a foreign tongue, but meaning came slowly out of the jumble, and Joan realized, with a mental start, that Jean's conjecture had, after all, been correct. The revelation at first shocked and pained her inexpressibly, but, as she mused upon it, the recollection of many past things crowded into her mind and took on new significance; she began to understand the real meaning of the man's periods of odd repression when in her presence, which she had found amusing, and called bashfulness as bad as a girl's; and the whole story of his temptation and his struggle became as an open book to her.

Being a woman, she comprehended, and forgave. Then came a gleam of joy; if he loved the other girl, and his heart had turned wholly back to her, the unhappiness, which she had fancied as being his, would vanish like a dream, and he would awake to full contentment in the affection of the woman to whom he would now return, as soon as he should become able to travel.

But what did those strange words mean, with which he seemed to be begging her not to despise

him so deeply, and when he said that it was all over — that he would give her up forever? Was the woman at home so different, then, from what Daniel had told her that the name "Faith" signified? Joan felt herself growing angry with the unknown girl, as though she had actually been present, and to blame for the bitter pain in the delirious man's heart.

"*I* would forgive him," she said aloud, thereby drawing a look of puzzled interrogation from the silent nursing sister. And she knew that her declaration was true, although it was accompanied by a brief pang of jealousy, when she applied the thought to Jean.

* * * * * * * *

The American doctor had come the previous afternoon, made his examination, and departed, shaking his head.

"I fully agree with Dr. du Bois," he had replied to her anxious query. "The patient may rapidly recover from the concussion, since his skull was not fractured — he must have had some particularly hard-headed Dutchman in his ancestral line — but the other wound is a touch and go. From the course which the bullet took, it may have just escaped, or just nicked, the outer covering of the heart, and in the latter case an aneurism is almost certain to result, and death. Dr. du Bois has done

everything possible to prevent infection in the wound, which was fortunately a clean one, and, if the heart was not injured, he may recover rapidly — time alone will tell. There is absolutely nothing that I could accomplish by remaining here, or that you, or any one, can do, Mademoiselle, except keep him as quiet as possible when the fever sets in."

All day long, except when Joan fairly drove her out to keep the grieving children amused, Suzette had sat on the top of the stairs just outside the chamber door. Her mother had hardly been able to coax her away for her meals, and they were all strangely disturbed on her account, for none of them had even imagined that her gay, youthful heart was capable of so sustained a grief. For she would not be comforted, and passed the dragging hours between sitting in a dazed silence, weeping spasmodically, and praying with feverish intensity.

All day long the little village had buzzed with the news of the tragedy, and feelings had run high. Many a black look was directed at the barred window behind which sat Jean Harent, for the American had been friendly with every one, and the personal friend of many. No question was raised as to the *poilu's* guilt. It was accepted, the case was too clear for doubt; and when the rumor spread that Daniel had died, a rumor born of the earlier one

that he was dying, there had been much angry muttering, and every soldier had been regarded with hostility.

Towards evening old Barbette had hobbled up the hill, with a cracked pitcher which held some dark, home-made brew, and had demanded that it be given to the wounded man. Dr. du Bois had tasted it, and asked her some questions regarding the ingredients used in its concoction. She had, at first, stubbornly refused to answer, but reconsidered, when he threatened to pour it out of the window. When the old woman had finished her voluble explanation, regarding the magic healing herbs which she had gathered, some by moonlight, some with the dew still on them, and insisted upon drinking some of it herself to prove that it was innocuous, the physician had smiled a little, and said to Joan, "Well, it cannot hurt him. It is mostly plain water, with some soothing elements which might help to allay the fever, and I have no objections to your giving some of it to him, if it will please the old woman — and he will take it."

Barbette had scowled blackly, and muttered many things derogatory to his know-everything profession, and, when he had left, she had insisted so violently that she had been especially chosen to save the American's life, that Joan — with the under-

lying strain of superstition of the Latin races — had half believed her. Thereafter, she had given the liquid, a spoonful at a time, to the delirious man.

The night had been a thing of horror to her, for he had raved, and thrashed about constantly, during the long hours while darkness and silence reigned outside, but dawn of the second day found him quieter, perhaps through increased weakness.

Then Joan had first realized how utterly she had spent her strength, how weary she was in body, mind and soul. Her mother commented anxiously upon her wan appearance, and the nurse had gently insisted that she go away, and rest for a while. There was nothing that she could do by remaining.

For a time Joan had resisted their entreaties and reasonings, with almost the petulance of a tired child, but, in the end, she yielded. Her mother begged her to lie down on her bed in the downstairs room, but the girl insisted that first she must take a little walk in the open air, and she put on her *sabots,* for it had rained during the night, and went out into the early spring sunshine.

Her habitual course was down the hillside toward the village, and her feet obeyed their established habit and carried her in that direction, although she had no conscious objective.

Indeed, she scarcely realized her surroundings.

Not until a voice, close by her elbow, addressed her by name, did she lift her eyes from the ground.

"And how goes it now, with the American Monsieur, Mlle. Joan?"

"He is better — at least I think that he is better. For the first time in a day and a half he sleeps quietly."

"Good, but I knew that it would be so; oh, yes, old Barbette knew. The shadows are beginning to lift; now he will get well, and old Barbette will have saved him by her potions, which the fool of a doctor would have thrown out of the window. You will see who was right, the fool of a doctor, or poor old Barbette."

There was a strange light on the grotesque, withered countenance, and a firm note of conviction in her voice. They caused the girl's heart to lighten in sympathy, and she actually felt a new courage flowing into it.

"Perhaps it is so. Oh, how I hope that it is so!" she answered, as she laid her hand kindly over the scrawny claw which held the cane. But the reflected light faded quickly away, like a sunset's afterglow, and left only shadows on Joan's pale countenance, and in her brooding eyes, as her thoughts carried her around the corner to where a prison stood within the angle of a church.

The old woman had not ceased to regard her closely, and now she began to nod, and smile her twisted, toothless smile.

"And when the American Monsieur is well again, all of Mlle. Joan's troubles will be ended, eh?" she croaked.

"Why do you speak and look like that, Madame? Is it then true, that you like to torture one, as some people say of you?"

"Some people say that of old Barbette, eh?" Instead of appearing angry, the old hag laughed with apparent satisfaction. "Some people are very wise and think that they know everything — and some people are fools," she added, ambiguously. "You have always treated me with courtesy, and I would like to be your friend, though you may doubt it. Yes, I like you; you are kind, you are young, and pretty as a flower, and why should not such a one be happy, as well?"

"Yet none is more unhappy than she. Oh, Madame," cried the girl, beseechingly, and she seized the wrinkled hand and pressed it against her young breast. "If thou couldst only help me!" In her despair Joan was almost like a child, ready to grasp at any straw of comfort, to believe in anything — even witchcraft — if it promised to solace her heart.

"And perhaps old Barbette can help thee, also, who knows? There are voices that she hears, to which all other ears are deaf, and sometimes they whisper strange things to her, aye, strange things." Again she nodded, sagely, but for an instant Joan's ready faith was shaken, for Dr. du Bois had casually mentioned that the strange old woman, abroad on one of her nocturnal prowls, had been before his cottage when Daniel was borne thither, and had listened with eager interest, as well as apparent anger, to the story of the assault upon him.

"Hast thou ever visited the ruined old chateau, yonder on the hilltop, Mademoiselle?" she demanded, with a peculiar insinuation. Joan started. Could the old woman read the thoughts of men, as she had heard folks say, or had she seen Daniel and her together there, on that fateful afternoon? Barbette was still watching her, and the girl nodded silently, with a question in her large eyes.

"It is an interesting spot, is it not? Old Barbette visits it often, and there sees many, many things — fine lords and ladies, in silks and laces, who dance in stately fashion for her; splendid feasts; young gallants of bygone days at their love-making; aye, and noble quarrels, when blood is shed over the color of a damsel's eyes, or other foolishness. And there the voices speak to her most clearly. Per-

haps if thou shouldst go to the old chateau, Mademoiselle . . . "

"What should I find?" demanded Joan, breathlessly.

"What wouldst thou find? Who has said that thou wouldst find anything? Not old Barbette. But at least there is calm, peace and beauty, there — thou wouldst find *that,* and strength is bred of these. Old Barbette knows, she knows."

"I *will* gó there," answered the girl, with sudden decision. The first part of the old woman's utterances was clearly but the foolishness of a poor, cracked brain, but there was wisdom in the last suggestion. Her secret place seemed to call out an invitation, to come and seek peace and strength in the silent woods; and, with a hurried word of farewell, she made her way through the village street — where many glances, not so friendly as of yore, were turned upon her — over the stone bridge, and toward the open field.

The dividing line between Mirabelle and its neighboring town, was marked by an ancient wayside cross of stone, its monumental pedestal cracked, and its steps well-worn by the contact of many a bended knee. A tree shadowed the spot, but, through an opening in its branches, the morning sunlight streamed full upon the symbol of her faith,

and made it appear as though it were actually rising out of the shadows, surrounded with golden glory. The new grass was still wet, but, heedless of this fact, Joan turned from the roadway, dropped on her knees before the cross and gazed up at it, raptly.

Religion had become a mere form with many of the men of France, until the war fanned the dying ember into a flame, here and there; but to the real French woman her faith is an integral part of her being, and Joan's look of devotion was tinged with awe. To her mind, already stirred to its depths by the emotions of the past two days, the purely natural phenomenon assumed a special meaning — an unspoken message addressed to her alone. Was the age of miracles really ended, as people said? France was flooded with strange stories from the battlefields, stories of happenings which seemed truly miraculous. And had not One said, that to them who have faith, all things are possible?

She arose, already comforted, and, with a deeper trust, walked across the flowering field, where the song of birds and the colorful blossoms still further calmed her turbulent heart.

But her weariness of body, which the climb up the steep hillside augmented, and the shadows under the trees, caused her painful thoughts to return to settle and prey upon her mind like black

birds. Memory revived every incident of the recent days which had been so full, and almost every one of them was laden with bitterness. Her mind dwelt upon each actor in the tragic drama, even down to the minor characters, one after the other; her heart ached for Marie, Georgette and little Pierre, and it found room for deep concern over her younger sister's patent grief.

"How strange it is," she mused, "that Suzette should be so terribly affected." Then she started, inwardly, and her eyes grew big. "Is it possible that she is really in love with Daniel? Impossible. Why, she is only a child — yet she is nearly seventeen, and perhaps the heart of a woman beats in her young breast. If this is true, the dear God help her, for her suffering is as great as mine, and he is not for her; she will lose him, even as I may lose . . . " Joan turned, and threw herself face downward upon the moss-covered bank, and cried aloud, "O, immortal Maid of Domremy — Joan, my patron saint — hear, and help me."

For the first time, her overcharged soul found the relief which lies in tears, and, with her face buried in the soft moss, she sobbed without restraint.

At length her shaking form became more quiet, and her breathing more even.

The shadows seemed to grow deeper, and to en-

fold her in a soothing, soft embrace. She could still see the sunlit valley below, and a glimpse of Mirabelle through a vista in the woods, but, somehow, it looked unfamiliar through her tears. Surely it was altered. The river wound more peacefully, and it had overflowed its banks and formed gleaming paths, and placid pools in the field; the hillside beyond was steeper, and the village much smaller, and more scattering. There seemed to be an unreal, mellow light, richer than sunshine, over everything. A little flock of snowy sheep was grazing on the green hillside, and there was a young girl, in quaint and old-fashioned attire, tending them. "How odd," thought Joan. "I felt sure that I knew every one in Mirabelle — if that *is* Mirabelle. Yet there is a damsel of about my own age, or a little younger, whom I have surely never seen before. Or have I?" She was greatly puzzled, and wished that she were closer to the young stranger so that she might speak to her. "For she is very lovely, especially her hair," she found herself adding. "The light shines on it just as it did on the wayside cross, at which I knelt on my way hither. It is almost like a halo. Why, it is a halo!" Then, suddenly, she understood who it was upon whom she was gazing. The realization did not surprise her, nor was she startled to find herself close to the girl, although just how it

had occurred she did not know. "Joan — Joan of Arc," she whispered, softly, yet with a strange thrill in her voice.

But The Maid did not turn at the words. She seemed to be speaking to someone else on the other side of her. Yes, there was another there — a maiden who seemed to be kneeling at her feet in an attitude of profoundest sorrow.

"Thou must confess the truth, poor child. It is the only way to right the wrong, and banish the ache from thine own heart," came in a voice like the sound of silver bells, far away.

The other girl slowly lifted her tear-stained face, and Joan caught herself starting, and wanting to cry aloud. For she was looking upon the face of . . . Suzette.

The picture faded and changed. The stream grew straighter, and began to dance in the sunlight, the hill was less high. The town covered it closely and left no room for sheep, or shepherdess. It was Mirabelle again.

The girl sprang to her feet, with ecstasy and terror in her countenance.

"Joan, Maid of Domremy!" she cried. "I have seen thee! Heaven has granted me a vision, as in

the olden days! But oh, what does it mean, what does it mean? I am so frightened!"

Trembling, often stumbling, she ran blindly down the twisting path, and across the fields. Only at intervals did she pause, to quiet the wild beating of her heart. Through the village she hastened, at scarcely diminished speed, and so came to her own home, flushed, panting, wide-eyed.

At the door Suzette met her. The younger girl's face was alight with gladness.

"Oh, Joan! He is better! He is himself again. He has just spoken a few words of understanding, and now he will get well. Oh, thank God, he will get well!"

CHAPTER XXI

SUZETTE'S CONFESSION

"SUZETTE, come to my chamber. I wish to talk with thee alone."

An unusual note of repression in Joan's voice caused her younger sister to look at her curiously, and something that she saw in the tense face before her, brought a sudden pallor to her own countenance, and an expression of fear to her dilating eyes. Suzette felt her knees grow weak and faltering, as she climbed the narrow stairs behind the other.

The door into Daniel's room was open, but Joan did not pause so much as to glance through it, as she passed, whereupon Suzette quavered, "Art thou not going to speak to Monsieur? He has been asking for thee."

"Not yet. There is another thing to be done, first."

"What other thing, my sister? Why dost thou look at me like that?"

"Come." Joan stood aside, and motioned for

Suzette to enter her own room. She quietly closed and locked the door behind them, and then, seating herself on the edge of the bed, took both of her sister's oddly cold hands in hers. She realized that they were trembling.

"Now, my dear one, I want thee to tell me the truth." By an effort, she kept her voice calm and clear.

"The truth? What dost thou mean, Joan?" whispered Suzette.

"She said, 'Thou must confess the truth. It is the only way to right the grievous wrong, and banish the ache from thine own heart.'"

"*She* said it? But who? What hast thou heard? Oh, I am frightened, Joan." The girl dropped to her knees before her sister, and clung desperately to her.

"Joan of Arc."

"What art thou saying? Has the trouble turned thy brain, or hast thou been dreaming?"

"Perhaps men would say that I have dreamed, but I know that Heaven has granted me a vision." She recounted her experience in the ruined chateau, and Suzette's eyes grew larger and more terrified the while. When the story was finished there was perfect silence in the room for a moment, like the lull in nature before the breaking of a storm. Then

Suzette uttered a sigh, that was half sob, and her head dropped against Joan's knees. The trembling of her body, which she had succeeded in controlling up to that instant, broke the barrier of her will, and her slender form was shaken with every breath. The other did not speak, but gently and steadily caressed the silken hair under her hand.

"Yes, it is true, Joan." The words came like a sigh, at length, and the muffled voice wailed on, "Oh, Joan, it is true, and I have been living in purgatory. I have tried to tell, but I was afraid, so afraid. And I prayed constantly that the American might recover, for it would have been too awful if he had died; and besides, if he lived he might then speak the words that would set Jean free, and perhaps I could always have kept my secret. But if he had died I should have told — oh, thou must believe that, my sister. Tell me that thou dost," she cried, in agony.

"Yes, yes, my dear one. Joan does believe it. But now thou must tell me all, for thy soul's sake."

"I am going to; I want to. Oh, I have wanted to all along, but I did not dare. It was not thy Jean who shot Monsieur Steele, but . . . " there followed a pause, which seemed interminable to the listening girl, " . . . but Lieutenant Villier."

"Lieutenant Villier? Suzette, how could it have

been? He left Mirabelle on the mid-afternoon train."

"No, he did not go — or rather he left the train at the next station, and came back."

"But why? How dost thou know all this? I do not understand, Suzette."

"He came back . . . " the muffled voice was dull with pain now. "He came back . . . for me, Joan."

"For thee? What art thou saying, my little sister?"

"It is true, Joan. Oh, I will tell thee everything, so that perhaps thou wilt understand." The long-pent-up words burst forth in a torrent of speech. "He loved me, I am sure that he loved me, for he told me so often. Please do not look that way, Joan. I could not help meeting him, when he began to ask that I do it, for he was so brave and handsome, and I cared for him so much."

"I do not blame thee, my little one, for thou art innocent and young. But why didst thou not tell us — or me, at least?"

"I was afraid that father and mother would forbid it, and that thou wouldst try to dissuade me, and say — as thou hast just done — that I was too young to have a lover. But I am almost seventeen, Joan, and no longer a child, although thou wouldst

treat me as one, still." Her spirit flared up for an instant, but she went on piteously. "He told me many wonderful stories about the great city of Paris, and he promised to take me there when he went home . . . Oh, Joan, I do not like to see you look at me that way! We were to be married; he said that we would surely be married, but it could not be here because he was afraid that my parents would not consent, until I should be older. But I was certain that they would forgive me when they knew that I loved him so, and that we were married. And so I promised to run away, and go with him as he asked. We would have gone on the afternoon train, but his comrades said that they were all going to the station to bid him farewell, so he told me that he would return at dusk, and meet me at the bridge a little while before the evening train left.

"Oh, I was so happy, even though I was afraid, too. But when the moment came, I found that I could not leave you, and I told him that I was frightened. Then he would not listen; he tried to take me in his arms and make me go to the train; that was all, Joan — but I guess that I screamed. And then . . . oh, Joan, truly I did not know that it was our Monsieur who came and saved me, for I ran away as fast as I could, and came home. But how I have suffered since I learned the truth, and it

seemed that Monsieur Steele must die. I felt as though I were a murderer, Joan, for I was to blame for it all."

"No, thou wert not wholly to blame, my Suzette. It was as much my fault as it was thine. For, if I had not aroused his jealousy, Jean might not have been suspected, and, indeed, it might not have happened at all, for I was also the cause of Daniel's being there. But if he had not . . . Oh, Suzette, it is terrible, but I am glad that he was there. Perhaps the *bon Dieu* willed it, so that thou mightest be saved, from that of which I cannot bear to think."

"Thou must not speak like that. Have I not said that we were to be married?"

"Poor little one, thou art indeed still a child. Monsieur, the lieutenant, is a Parisian, wealthy, and of the 'class.' Such a one does not marry a simple village girl, my sister."

"But he loved me, Joan," persisted the girl, unshaken.

"Perhaps he did. I will not say that it is not so, nor do I blame him. Oh, my dear, my dear, how my heart aches for thee! Tell me, dost thou still care?"

"I do not know. My heart has been so numb at times, and so filled with bitter pain at others, that I scarcely know how I feel. But, after what has happened, I could never, never see him again." The

elder girl held her close in her arms until the trembling form grew quieter, and the dry sobs ceased.

"Go out-of-doors, and take a long walk by thyself, Suzette. Thou hast need of it, even as I had, and I want to be alone, and think."

"And thou hast forgiven me; thou wilt save me, Joan?"

"Yes, little one. Do not be afraid any more."

"But Jean? Cannot he be taken from that awful prison at once?"

"I hope that it may be so, but, as much as I love him, and suffer to have him there — I would gladly take his place if it were possible — a little longer will make no difference now, and he would understand, if he were to know the truth. Come, do as I have told thee, and stay out-of-doors until thou art calmer. Everything is coming out all right at last, for, thanks to the merciful God, Daniel will live. Thou art sure of that, Suzette?"

"Yes, even the doctor has said so. His escape is a miracle, he says."

"Kiss me, and go." The two sisters clung to one another for a long time, then Joan gently pushed the other from the room, and closed the door behind her. She felt that she needed to be alone, and to think as she had never thought before.

Although immeasurable relief filled her heart,

there was a new ache in it — that which had been in Suzette's, and she was glad that she could bear it for her. But now she must find some way to save her little sister. If her story became known, even to her father, the happiness of the family would be forever ended, she felt. He was just, and would do nothing to the child, but he was also stern and the happiness of her young life would be ruined. And Joan knew that she was not afraid to trust her, henceforth. The girl had learned one of life's hardest lessons, and she would not err again.

At last she arose, and went silently into Daniel's room.

The man slowly turned his bandaged head, and regarded her with a flickering smile of pleasure, which swiftly faded into an expression of humiliation and sorrow. This vanished in turn, as she seated herself by the bedside, took his hand in her soothing clasp, and softly stroked his rumpled hair. Daniel closed his aching eyes with a sense of utter peace.

"I will sit with him for a little while, if you wish to go for a walk, or visit the convent, my sister," she remarked to the nurse, who gave her a look of gratitude, and glided from the chamber.

"Daniel, thou art better; thou art going to get well," affirmed Joan, quietly.

"Of course. I feel as strong as an ox now," he smilingly agreed, but his weak voice somewhat belied the assertion.

"Shall I sit like this, or art thou strong enough to talk for a few moments? I suppose that the doctor has told them to keep thee quiet, and I would not suggest it, if it were not important — to another."

"Of course I can talk, dear girl, but I do not know what to say to thee . . . how to ask thy pardon for . . . "

She laid her finger gently, but firmly, on his lips. "It is not about that, my dear. I understand, and thou art never to speak of it again; indeed, I was the one to blame. But now I am happy, for I know that the sweet girl, whom thou callest Faith, is waiting for thee in America."

He started visibly, and closed his eyes as though something were hurting him. Then he whispered the inquiry, "How didst thou know that she . . . "

Joan laughed, a little unsteadily. "Perhaps I am like old Barbette, and have voices that tell me things that others cannot hear. She has been deeply concerned over thine . . . illness, Daniel, and brought thee a strange brew, which she insists was the thing that saved thy life."

"Perhaps it is true," he replied, and, realizing

that for some reason she did not want to answer his inquiry, he refrained from pressing it.

"Daniel, there is one question that I must ask thee to answer, even though the subject is painful to us both. Dost thou know who it was that wounded thee?"

His expression indicated that he was startled again, and that bitter memories were stirring to life in his brain, but he did not reply. Nevertheless Joan felt that she was answered.

"He . . . Lieutenant Villier escaped; he has not been suspected, Daniel."

"I am glad. I had hoped that it was so, but have not dared to ask," he responded. "And I hope that he did not know that it was I who attacked him. He was my friend and I could even forgive him for wounding me, for it was to save his life, if it were not for the other thing that he had done. And no one knows that thou wert there, Joan?"

"I?" Her astonishment was unmistakably evidenced in the intonation with which she spoke.

"But yes. Thou seest, I recognized thy voice. Was it not thee after all?" he demanded.

Joan's thoughts were working swiftly in an endeavor to fit this new idea into the tragic tangle. The truth burst upon her like a great light, for she knew that her voice and Suzette's were much alike.

"Thou camest to save me?" she whispered, with a thrill in the words.

"Of course. But I do not understand. If it was not thee . . . "

The girl's heart leaped with happiness. She need not tell him the truth, and so Suzette would be spared even his knowledge of her shame.

"Please do not ask any more about it. I want to forget," she evaded, with downcast eyes, and his response was a weak pressure on her hand.

"Yes, the lieutenant escaped, Daniel, but . . . oh, I hate to tell thee . . . another was arrested for his crime, and now awaits trial in the military prison."

"Another? But how is it possible, and who is it?" He attempted to struggle up, crying, "Joan, it is not . . . ?"

"Yes, it is thy friend and my lover, Jean."

With a gasp of pain, Daniel sank weakly back, but although he seemed unable to voice the question in his eyes, she understood, and very simply retold the story of how he had been found, and why the cloak of guilt had fallen upon the *poilu*.

"We must save him . . . at once, Joan," he panted. "But why hast thou waited; why hast thou not told the truth before? And how was Villier there at all — I thought that he had departed

for Paris. Oh, there are many things which I do not understand."

Joan was now face to face with the necessity of making a direct falsehood. She hesitated, but only because she did not know how to answer, and the sudden appearance of Suzette in the doorway, saved her.

The girl's eyes were red, and her face streaked with tears. "I have been listening, Joan. I could not stay alone, and crept back to the door. She said that I must tell the truth, and now *thou* must; I will not have thee lie, for me. Please tell him, for I cannot." She dropped by the bedside and buried her head in the clothes, and, before Joan had finished, Daniel was gently passing his hand over the child's curls, with pitying caress.

"It is all right now, my little sister. Thou wert not to blame, nor do I now blame Villier so greatly, for I know his nature, and God has made me understand something of his temptation."

"And thou wilt not demand that he be punished, Monsieur?" entreated Suzette.

"Not by men, but I think that he is already being punished by a higher power." His thoughts returned, as they had so often, to Barbette's queer prophecies — "his soul will sweat with the tortures of the damned, and old Barbette will laugh."

"Come, do not cry any more, little sister. We have all of us sinned, but God is kind to his children, and it is for us to atone by overcoming evil with good, hate with love. This is my faith, and, thanks to Him, I have come back to it. I forgive Lieutenant Villier, even as thou hast, but, when I am well enough to go to Paris, I must see him, for I know that he needs my help. And poor Jean, how he must have suffered, loving thee, Joan, and facing death, for I know that such an assault by a soldier brings capital punishment."

"He also sinned, Daniel."

"Through a love that was higher than mine. But thou must hasten to the Commandant, and tell him that I want to speak to him at once. I shall tell him that I recognized my assailant, and that it was not Jean."

"But if he should insist that thou tellest who it was, or at least describe him, Daniel?" There was new terror in Joan's voice.

"I should refuse."

* * * * * * * *

The interview, which followed a little later, was brief, for Dr. du Bois early recognized the signs of returning feverishness, caused by excitement, and would not permit his superior long to press his in-

terrogations, after Daniel had spoken the words which meant freedom to Jean Harent.

"You will swear that what you say is true, Monsieur?" the commanding officer demanded, bluntly, and with no attempt to disguise his astonishment and doubt.

"Those of my faith follow the Biblical injunction and do not swear, my commandant. But I affirm it, and with a Friend, an affirmation has all the sanctity of an oath."

"And you say that you saw the face of your assailant?"

"Yes, my commandant."

"Who was he, then? Can you describe him?"

"I repeat that it was not Jean Harent. More I cannot tell you, Monsieur."

"But the pistol! You understand that it was found, and admitted by the prisoner to have been that of Lieutenant Villier, who had declared that it was lost?"

"All that I can say is that somebody must have found it, but not Jean Harent."

It was at this point that the physician interfered, for Daniel had lifted his voice excitedly, and two deep red spots were beginning to burn in his cheeks. And the Commandant departed, shaking his head and clearly unsatisfied.

But when the purple shadows slowly blotted out the glowing sunset, whose colors had flooded Mirabelle with a glorious light that evening, Jean Harent was free. And after he had stood for a moment by Daniel's bedside, and clasped his hand in a silence that was more eloquent than words, he went out into the night where one star was already shining, clear and bright in the western sky.

Another went forth with him, and as the once more kindly shadows enveloped them, the Maid of Mirabelle was held close to his heart.

THE END AND THE BEGINNING

"And so the story ends," I think, as Joan's young voice, lifted in happy song, comes again from below my window, and I turn away with one last lingering glance at the peaceful scene before me.

Perhaps it were better to say that one big chapter in the book of her life is closed to-day, and another begins; for although romancers regard marriage as the end-all of their stories, realists insist that it but concludes the prologue to the greater drama.

And Daniel? Ah well, in real life all of us, from time to time, hear brief strains of unfinished songs, see fragments of comedy or tragedy played in some small corner of the world-wide stage, and then the actors pass from our ken, and we never know what came of it at last.

Indeed, I did not even witness the events which my mind has just reviewed, for I came to Mirabelle during the American's convalescence, but as we — two strangers in a strange land — became close friends, I heard enough of the story from Daniel himself, and later from Joan and Jean, so that my

imagination could, without stretch, supply the missing parts and rebuild the drama.

This much, however, I do know. His wonderful constitution enabled him to recover from his wounds with astonishing rapidity, and before the end of April he was able to travel, and left for home, honorably discharged, to complete his convalescence.

I was not present when he bade Joan and Jean farewell, but I saw the maid a moment afterwards, and her wonderful eyes were luminous with tears. And how Suzette and the children from over the way, wept and clung to him at parting! And how the simple villagers, and many of the soldiers as well, flocked to the little cottage to shake his hand! Only one was missing. The very day before, poor old Barbette had been found in her rude bed, in the peaceful sleep from which there is no earthly awakening. She had finally passed "just around the corner where there is rest."

I was able to accompany him as far as Paris, and — at his request — went with him in a madly driven taxicab to the address which Lieutenant Villier had given him during their last *déjeuner* together. We were shown into the reception room of his bachelor apartment, and his valet knocked on the door to an inner chamber. The door opened, and I saw a tall, dark young man, dressed in civilian

clothes, step out, and then check himself with a violent start. His pale, handsome face blanched, and if ever human eyes spoke of remorseful suffering, or human countenance bore the lines of mental anguish, his did. I doubt if he regarded me at all, for his whole gaze was bent on Daniel, with terror and relief struggling in it for the ascendancy.

The Frenchman stepped back, haltingly. The American followed. The door of the chamber closed behind them both.

What occurred within the closed room only they, and God, know. But I could guess, for when they re-appeared, after a quarter of an hour, perhaps, an amazing change had taken place in both. It was Daniel whose look was one of deep weariness, as though the interview had taken all of his meager strength, but the other's face was almost transfigured. His brief farewell was significant.

"I live again, my friend."

And so Daniel departed for home, and whatever Fate held in store for him there; while I returned to Mirabelle, to take his room in the house of the good Monsieur le Jeune. But, although I count all of the household sincerely my friends, and the bewitching Suzette — more child than woman again — has become my little adopted sister, I know that

I can never quite fill the place in their hearts which was held by Daniel Steele, Friend.

* * * * * * * *

My musing review of the days that are gone is brought to an end by the voice of the Maid of Mirabelle, as she calls from beneath my window, "Hasten, my Pierre, or thou wilt not be ready to go to the church, and see thy brother Jean and thy Joan married. And, Pierre, tell Marie to wash thy face well, especially behind the ears."

"Oh, *Joan!* And I thought that it was going to be so nice, living with thee!" The note of protest in the treble voice bespeaks the shattering of another childish dream, and the girl's merry laughter joins with my own, as I step back to my post at the window, and look down at the little soldier of France, who is dragging his *sabots* with rebellious slowness towards home, upon his glowing face a shadow which seems like the visible reflection of the doleful thought, "Even my idolized one, my Joan, is not perfect."

She glances up, and cries, "And thou, too, must hasten, Monsieur. What would thy friend, Daniel, say, if thou wert late at my wedding, for did he not charge thee to represent him there?"

"Yes, and behold, I am quite dressed — although

my many thoughts have made me slow this morning."

"I, too, have been thinking of many things," she answers, her laugh dying away as a faint sigh. "And I have prayed the good God that Monsieur Steele is as happy as I am, to-day."

"We should not doubt it, Mademoiselle."

"No, and on such a morning all shadows, big and little, flee away. See, even Pierre is smiling again. Hasten, then, my little one," she calls to the boy, and as her head disappears from my sight, another lark starts up from behind the ruined cottage opposite, and wings heavenward, throbbing with joyful song.

For it is May, and Morning in Mirabelle.

THE END.

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